

# The Illustrated London News

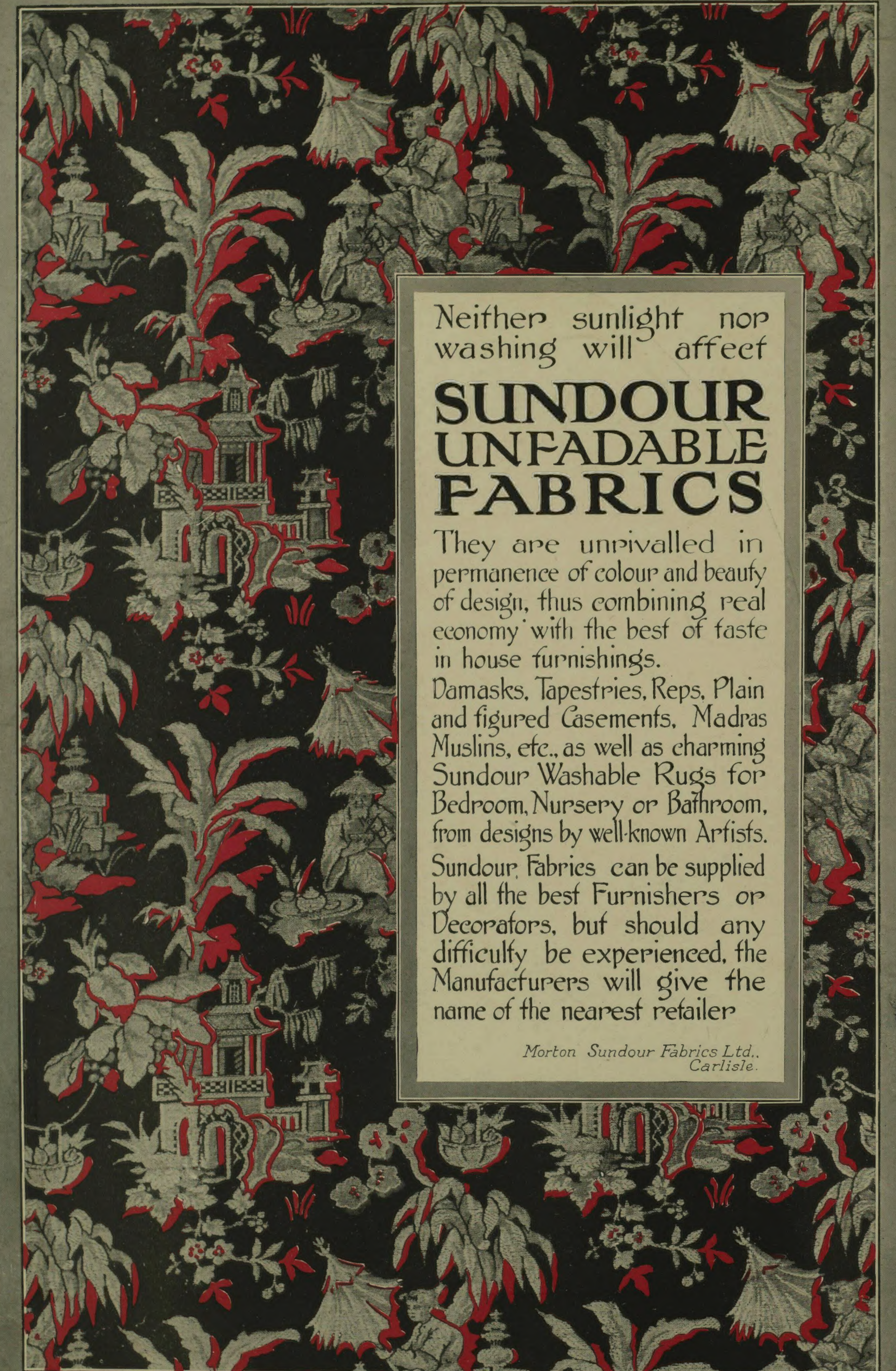


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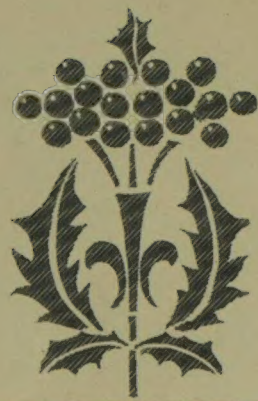
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# THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

CHRISTMAS NUMBER.



AN ILLUSTRATION TO SAX ROHMER'S COMPLETE NOVEL, "THE BLACK MANDARIN," CONTAINED IN THIS ISSUE.

"Around a long council-table a party of ten was assembled, nine men and one woman; at least I assumed the nine cowed figures to be men. All were standing, facing us, hands upraised in the salute. . . . I found all my attention focussed upon the woman."



# THE BLACK MANDARIN

By  
SAX ROHMER.



Author of "Dr. Fu Manchu";  
"The Golden Scorpion";  
"Dope"; etc., etc.

Illustrated by  
W. R. S. Stott.



MEETING TO-NIGHT  
at 2

## CHAPTER I.

### A PERFUMED ENVELOPE.

WITH increasing irritation I listened to the sound of someone belabouring the knocker of the top set, immediately above me. Dimly I could hear, too, the purring of a bell. I did not know Michael Hebron, my new neighbour; I had not seen him since he had entered into occupation of the chambers, but that he was from home at the moment seemed evident.

Therefore, throwing open my door, I stepped out upon the landing, looked up, and—

"Hullo, there!" I cried. "Mr. Hebron is out. Can I help you?"

The pill-box cap of a District Messenger appeared over the rail of the stair-head.

"A letter for Mr. Hebron, Sir," the boy called down. "Will you sign for it?"

"Certainly," I answered. "He shall have it immediately he returns."

At that, the messenger came down, and I signed the green slip which he handed to me, taking charge of a square envelope made of unusually thick, amber-coloured paper. Bestowing silent maledictions upon the absent man, whose affairs not only disturbed my work, but also called upon me to pay his tips, I dismissed the boy, who gave me a cheery "Good-night, Sir," and went back to my study, carrying the envelope.

I tossed it on the table, and returned to my incompleted article. The clock told me that a messenger would ere long be clamouring at my own door for copy; and, biting hard upon my pipe, I concentrated on the task, which must be finished by eleven o'clock though the heavens fell.

Surely enough, I had yet a hundred words or so to write when my bell rang. The sequence of my argument running in my head to a kind of rhythm, I stood up, walked to the outer door, opened it, and—

"Wait in the lobby," I said, turned, and walked back.

Three minutes of feverish scribbling brought my work to a close. I pinned the sheets together and went out to hand them to the messenger. At the door of the room I pulled up short.

Seated in the lobby chair was my friend, Paul Harley!

"Well, Knox," he said, looking up at me with his quizzical smile, "I have waited!"

"Harley!" I cried. "Was it *you* I opened to?"

"Careless of you, Knox," he returned, shaking his head. "Slipshod—not worthy of the merest boob. Just think. I might have been the Prince of Wales, or, on the other hand, I might have been the most bloodthirsty ruffian in Europe. Yet, without a glance, you mutter 'Wait in the lobby'—involving, in the first case, royal displeasure; in the second, certainly robbery, possibly murder."

"My dear fellow," I said, laughing, "excuse my preoccupation. I was expecting a boy from—ah, here he is!"

The bell rang, and I opened the door to find the messenger from the newspaper. I handed him the copy, which he placed in his satchel and departed. Then, turning—

"That's that!" I exclaimed. "What do you say to a whisky-and-soda, Harley? You look over-tired."

"Over-tired!" he echoed. "I am dead-beat, Knox, to use an expressive idiom from across the water."

We entered the study, and Paul Harley dropped wearily into the arm-chair beside my writing-table. Pallor it were impossible to detect because of his bronzed skin, but I thought that some of the old eager vitality was lacking to-night, and I wondered upon what obscure problem of the underworld he was expending his dynamic energy. The greyiness at his temples was becoming increasingly noticeable; but, for all his present

weariness, I knew that Paul Harley, of Chancery Lane, yet retained his unique position—that of the man in whom Home Office and Foreign Office reposed their entire confidence.

Crossing to a little side-table, I poured out a stiff peg. My hand on the lever of the syphon, I turned.

"Say when," I invited.

Harley did not reply. He had not heard me. Instead he held the amber-coloured envelope left by the District Messenger immediately under his nose, and he was smelling vigorously.

"Harley," I said, "what are you doing?"

He lowered the envelope and glanced up at me from under his heavy brows. His face was transfigured. Languor was gone. He was revived.

"Smelling," he answered. "Knox"—he stood up—"have you smelt this letter?"

"Certainly not!" said I. "Why should I?"

"But you should," he assured me, and extended the amber envelope. "Oblige me, Knox, by doing so."

I took the letter and sniffed suspiciously. I suspected some trick. However, I discovered it to be delicately perfumed. I stared uncomprehendingly at my friend.

"Evidently," I said, "my neighbour is a man of gallantry."

"I am not interested in the state of Mr. Michael Hebron's heart," replied Harley. "I am merely interested in the quality of the perfume. Is it familiar to you?"

"Not at all. But perfumes are outside my province, Harley."

"Possibly. But you would recognise attar of roses, and the many floral bouquets also, no doubt—the preparations of the popular French firms?"

"You flatter me. I doubt it. But what is the point?"

"The point is that this envelope is perfumed with none of these."

"Indeed. What then?"

"Just this, Knox." Harley laid the letter on my blotting-pad and pointed his finger at me forensically. "There is an aristocracy of perfumes, as there is an aristocracy of wines and cigars. In pre-war days, if you had told me that you had tasted a particular wine of a particular vintage, I could have informed you with which of the Grand Dukes you had dined. Certain rare and choice brands of cigars in the same way were peculiar to certain ducal houses. This perfume"—he lowered the pointed finger and rested it upon the amber envelope—"is used by only one connoisseur, to my knowledge, in Europe!"

"But, Harley—can you be sure of this?"

"Humanly, yes. In your own experience, Knox, you have seen how a peculiar blend of tobacco can afford a clue to a wanted man. I have studied tobacco exhaustively. Is it not evident that perfume plays the same part where a woman is concerned? In these commercial days I know of only three perfumes which cannot be obtained in the public market. This"—he pressed his hand upon the letter—"happens to be one of them!"

"Meaning?" said I.

"Meaning that Fate guided my steps to your door, Knox!"—he rested his hand on my shoulder—"I have been at work in Chinatown for days and nights looking for the clue that lies here on your table!"

"In Chinatown!" I exclaimed. "But what on earth can this letter to Mr. Michael Hebron have to do with Chinatown?"

"That we have to learn," replied Harley. He removed his topcoat and laid it, with his hat, upon a chair. "About half-and-half, Knox"—nodding in the direction of the syphon. "I need a stimulant."

Abstractedly, for the tenor of all this passed my comprehension, I prepared two drinks, setting one before my friend, who was now seated at the table, studying my neighbour's letter intently.

"What do you know about this man Hebron?" he asked abruptly, holding the envelope against the shade of the lamp.

"Nothing," I replied, dropping into the arm-chair vacated by Harley. "He has lived in the top set for a month or more. I have never seen him and I don't know his business."

"Then how do you come to be in possession of his private correspondence?"

I briefly explained, filling my pipe the while. As I concluded—

"Good," muttered Harley. "It is Kismet. If I may borrow your tobacco-jar, Knox, I will fill my own pipe. Whilst I am so engaged, perhaps you will be good enough to put a kettle on and to bring me a loaf—a new loaf if you have one."

"Put a kettle on and bring you a loaf!" I said incredulously. "My dear fellow, if you have had no dinner, I can manage something better than skilly!"



"Thanks, Knox," he replied, studying the back of the envelope. "But it is food for the mind that I am seeking at the moment. A very complicated seal," he muttered. "But we must do our best."

"Harley!" I said sharply, standing up, "some part of your design begins to dawn upon me. For what purpose you require a loaf I cannot imagine: but am I to understand that you calmly propose to steam open a letter left in my care?"

He turned about, facing me. His clean-shaven face wore its grimmest expression.

"Knox," said he, meeting my half-angry, half-incredulous stare, "did you ever know me stoop to a dirty trick?"

"Never," I returned, without hesitation.

"Very well. This"—he indicated the amber-coloured envelope—"is no love-letter. It is sealed, as you can see; but the seal is one I have never met with before. It is also scented—and the scent tells me that it comes from the most dangerous woman in London—in Europe—perhaps in the world. Your neighbour, Michael Hebron, if not an accomplice of this woman, is one of her victims. Therefore, we are going either to prove his guilt or to save him—"

"But, Harley—" I interrupted.

"The woman or her associates," he resumed evenly, "has literally sent thousands to their death. Apart from several assassinations traceable to her personal beauty, she has been instrumental in emptying at least one throne, and her activities during the Great War cost England as many lives as the Gallipoli campaign!"

"Good God, Harley! You appal me!"

"Her presence in London now means that some menace threatens the very basis of the British Empire. The Foreign Office has moved heaven and earth to trace her movements. I have been given *carte blanche*, and for weeks past, whilst you thought me to be out of town, I have actually been at work, night and day, seeking some clue upon which it might be possible to act."

"Harley, who is she? What is her nationality?"

"She is famous in four capitals as Madame de Medici. Who she is I have yet to learn. Her nationality I suspect, but I am not certain of it. If you have any lingering doubts, Knox, respecting the propriety of my projects—"

"I have none, Harley," I said, aghast at these revelations.

"Then perhaps you will put a kettle on and bring me a loaf."

"Very well."

"And—oh, Knox, at the same time get a poker red hot, if possible! A clean poker."

## CHAPTER II.

### WHAT IT CONTAINED.

"UNPLEASANTLY complicated," muttered Harley, as I presently returned carrying a loaf of bread.

He was seated at the table studying the envelope, which lay, face downward, on the blotting-pad. As I entered he reversed it and stared at the large, bold, feminine writing of the inscription. He glanced up at me.

"Have you ever seen writing like this before?" he asked.

"No. It is curiously characteristic."

"Characteristic, yes; but of what?"

"Well"—I studied it with interest—"the writer is certainly not English. She might be French. The figure seven, for instance, is crossed."

"Quite so. But this form is common to quite a number of Continental countries. The outstanding peculiarity, Knox, is the uniform thickness of the plane and the erect strokes."

"Yes," I agreed, "it is curious. She must use a very broad nib."

"Probably a quill," murmured Harley.

He pulled the top off the loaf and extracted a piece of doughy bread, which he proceeded to roll into a large smooth pellet.

"Once we start," he said, "speed is of the essence of success. Would you mind making one or two of these bread bullets, Knox? Press them firmly, so as to get a smooth surface."

Feeling unusually like a queer sort of lunatic, I obliged my friend, recognising that this apparent farce had some stern but hidden purpose. When four pellets were completed to Harley's satisfaction, he set them in a row on the blotting-pad and gazed meditatively at a number of briar pipes resting in a bowl near his elbow.

"Yes," said he, "these will serve."

He proceeded to fit bread balls into the bowls of four pipes. He then pressed each one firmly on the pad to flatten the bulge.

"Good," said he, looking up at me with a smile. "Our experiment proper now begins. The process you are about to see in operation would be of great interest to a dishonest butler, for instance. Fortunately, it calls for a delicacy of touch rarely found among the domestic classes."

Once more he placed the amber-coloured envelope face downward on the pad.

"A critical test, Knox," he said. "A very complex seal, evidently Ancient Egyptian, and probably a unique scarab."

The letter was sealed with curious, golden-looking wax, several shades darker than the paper, and this was the device impressed upon it:

Harley took up the first pipe, lightly touched the bread surface with his tongue, and then, inverting the bowl, firmly pressed it down upon the seal. He glanced at it, laid it aside, and went through the same routine with the other three.

"Now!" said he.

Something of his repressed excitement had communicated itself to me. With bated breath I watched him break away the golden wax, with a sharp blade, from below the lapel of the envelope, leaving intact that actually adhering to the tongue of paper. Every fragment he carefully transferred to a little copper ash-tray. Through a powerful glass which he drew from his pocket, he studied the result of his labours, and seemed to be satisfied. Out to where a tin kettle boiling on a gas-stove jetted forth steam we went. A small steel poker was wedged between the bottom of the kettle and the bars of the stove.

Very adroitly, Paul Harley steamed open the envelope. I stood at his elbow, watching eagerly as he inserted two fingers and drew out a slip of white pasteboard, of about the size of a *carte de visite*. There was nothing else in the envelope.



Harley took up the first pipe. . . . and then, inverting the bowl, firmly pressed it down upon the seal.



But if I was surprised and excited, a quick glance at my friend's face told me that this discovery was one of paramount importance.

"My God, Knox!" he said sharply. "Do you see?"

"I see," I replied, "but I don't understand."

And, in order that I be not hastily accused of stupidity, I reproduce below the figure and writing which appeared upon the card:



"Of course," muttered Harley, staring at the card, back and front, through his pocket lens. "I forget that you know nothing of this business. Well—we have no time to waste. Memorise all details, Knox, for I am about to complete our experiment."

He returned the card to the envelope, stuck down the gum, which remained moist from the action of the steam, and:

"Bring the poker!" he directed.

A strange spectacle, had there been any to witness it, we returned to the study, I carrying the fiery poker.

"Hold it firmly here," said Harley rapidly. "Rest it against the ink-stand."

He tipped the fragments of golden wax on to the broken seal, arranging them with a delicate forefinger. This accomplished, he moved the envelope gently to and fro beneath the red-hot

point of the poker until the entire seal became fluid. With the wetted end of a penholder he made the whole fairly even. Then, laying the envelope down, he took up a briar containing one of the bread moulds, touched its surface with his tongue, and glanced sharply aside at me, smiling grimly.

"To be or not to be?" he muttered.

Firmly he pressed the mould down upon the wax, swiftly raised it, and:

"How's that?" he cried triumphantly.

Magically, the golden seal was intact again! True, the imprint was not so sharp as that made by the scarab, but the sharpness of such impressions varies very greatly, and it must have called for a keen eye to detect any irregularity in the complex figure of the snake-wrapped beetle.

"Right the first time, Knox!" said Harley. "I might have spared you the task of making additional bread bullets! However, prudence is a virtue."

He studied the spurious seal through his lens.

"Yes," he murmured. "Traces of bread crumb! Unavoidable, of course. A few minutes more and our moulds would have become useless—too dry."

He relighted his pipe and sat down in the armchair. Having placed the hot poker in the fender, I extracted bread from one of my own briars and began reflectively to fill the bowl. I could hear the clock of St. Paul's striking midnight. Harley's face had grown masklike, expressionless. I thought that he was staggered by the momentous character of this discovery which to me portended nothing.

I found myself considering, with a sort of fearful curiosity, the character of my mysterious neighbour, Michael Hebron, and I found myself listening for any sound from above which should tell me that he was returned. Harley, having his eyes closed, began to speak.

"You noted the time mentioned, Knox?"

"Two o'clock. It has just struck twelve."

"Yes. I have two hours; two hours in which to do—what?"

"I cannot imagine."

"Perhaps to save the world from some new disaster! Good God! it is an awful responsibility! You noted the figure on the card?"

"Of course. It resembled that of a priest in cassock and biretta."

"Think again. I urged you to memorise details."

"I am thinking, Harley."

"Did you ever see a biretta with a feather in it?"

"Good heavens! Of course, something resembling a feather was shown!"

"Did you ever see a mandarin?"

"A mandarin!" I cried excitedly—"That's it, Harley! It was the figure of a mandarin!"

"Undoubtedly. The Black Mandarin."

"The Black Mandarin?" I echoed. "Who is the Black Mandarin?"

But Harley, instead of answering my question, asked another:

"Are you following the extraordinary events now taking place in China?"

"Through the medium of the Press, yes."

"Have you formed any definite opinion?"

"Well—" I hesitated—"the country is in a very disturbed state—"

"Very!" said Harley, suddenly opening his eyes, and snapping out the word with almost vicious emphasis. "Hasn't the fact dawned upon you, Knox, that China is in the throes of a new disruption? Which of the Chen Chiungs and Sun Yat Sens do you regard as China's future ruler?"

"I am afraid your question is somewhat difficult to answer."

"Then I will answer it myself: None of them! They are seeking, each in his own way, to reconstruct and repair the broken fabric of the Celestial Empire. But another and more penetrating movement has taken root, and China is threatened with a despotism which, if successful, may plunge the world into greater horrors than war within the next few years. China is now an integral factor in international politics: all the great nations are mixed up in her affairs—that, indeed, is the root cause of the whole trouble—and the new movement seeks to bring about a reversion to that exclusiveness which formerly was China's greatest strength.

The Chinese still believe that the yellow race can dominate the world, and the Oriental mind spells out the means in a manner altogether opposite to Western ideas. A man whose name has never appeared in the Press, whose name is unknown even to some of the highest officials at Pekin, is the brain at present moving the tentacles of the Yellow Octopus."

"And who is this man?" I asked, with rising excitement.

"He is the Black Mandarin?"

"But what is his name?"

"A poser, Knox!" said Harley, standing up. "The Secret Services of four nations have been at work all over the East as well as the West for years trying to find an answer to that question!"

"He does not confine his movements to China, then?"

"Certainly not. He is constantly travelling, from capital to capital, undermining the social order of things, destroying the best intellects, and so joining up the delicate threads of a giant cord designed to strangle half the world!"

"But this is unspeakably horrible! In fact, it is barely credible."

"The really big things, Knox, the things that threaten the solidity of empires, the peace of nations, never appear credible until they have happened! But at least we have scored one point. We know for certain something which hitherto we had only suspected: that the dangerous Madame de Medici is the London representative of the Black Mandarin."

"We know more!" I cried. "We know that the man Hebron is also involved in this business."

"In two hours or less he will be—where? Presumably at the house of Madame."

"Do you know this house?"

"Quite well."

"And what do you propose to do?"

"Firstly, Knox," replied Harley, "I propose to ask you to step upstairs and to inform Mr. Michael Hebron, if he is at home, that you have a letter for him. I am extraordinarily anxious to hear Mr. Hebron's voice, but equally anxious to avoid being either seen or heard by him."

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE BLACK COWLS.

"IT'S no good, Harley," I reported. "There isn't a sound from his chambers."

Paul Harley paced uneasily up and down the study.

"Mischief!" he muttered—"mischief somewhere. Associates of Madame de Medici are not so forgetful, Knox; and the fact that so many clever men have drawn blank for years in all attempts to start up the Black Mandarin would point to the fact that those who know him are also scrupulously careful. Therefore—why is Mr. Michael Hebron not at home?"

"He may not have anticipated such a summons?" I suggested.

"What time was it delivered?"

"Shortly before eleven."

"In only giving him three hours' notice, Madame clearly assumed that he would be at home. He was certainly expecting such a summons, Knox. What time is that striking now?"

"A quarter to one."

Harley continued his restless promenade. Suddenly he stopped, turned, and stared at me queerly.

"Is it possible that our man has scented mischief?" he said. "I should not know Mr. Hebron from the Grand Lama, but Mr. Hebron may have the advantage of knowing me quite well! Perhaps he saw me come here, or perhaps—"

He glanced in the direction of the study door.

"Knox," he asked, "is there any means of communication between these chambers and those above?"

"No fire-escape or anything of that kind," I replied. "You were thinking we might have been overheard?"

"Well, I must find some explanation of the matter. Believe me, Knox, the organisation surrounding the Black Mandarin works faultlessly. Nothing is left to chance. We may dismiss the idea that this man's absence is due to carelessness either on his own part or on that of Madame de Medici."

"He may yet return in time."

"He will have to hurry. There is barely time now."

"Or the rendezvous chosen may not be the house of this woman."

"The writing on the card and on the envelope is that of Madame de Medici. I will use your telephone if you don't mind, Knox."

Harley took up the instrument, and:

"East two hundred," he called. Following a short interval which he suffered with impatience: "Hullo! yes," he said. "Paul Harley speaking. Has Inspector Wessex returned? . . . Ah! very well. I should be obliged if you would send a messenger to him at once. A close watch should be kept on the house. Anyone leaving must be followed at all costs. Ask the Inspector to keep in touch with you, as I shall be returning not later than two o'clock and will advise you where I will meet him. Meanwhile, as I am working against time, would you 'phone the Yard for a raid squad to start for Limehouse now, and have them send a fast car to wait outside my office, at once? Thanks. Good-bye."

As he replaced the receiver, I heard the clock of St. Paul's strike one.

"Now for action!" said he, and smiled grimly. "We will give the invisible Mr. Hebron one more chance. Do you happen to know his 'phone number?"

"No," I shook my head. "But, hold on! Martindale Smith leased those chambers for several years and only gave them up two months ago, when he married. The number will be under his name."

I snatched up the directory, skimmed down the long columns of Smiths, and presently discovered: "Smith, J. Martindale, K.C. . . . Central 24621."

"Good!" said Harley. "Give him a ring."

I obeyed, and found myself to be consumed with impatience, doubtless communicated to me by Harley. However, the exchange reported, "No reply," and I hung up the receiver and turned to my friend, whose behaviour now resembled that of a caged animal.





He tipped the fragments of golden wax on to the broken seal, arranging them with a delicate forefinger. This accomplished, he moved the envelope gently to and fro beneath the red-hot point of the poker until the entire seal became fluid. With the wetted end of a penholder he made the whole fairly even. Then, laying the envelope down, he took up a briar containing one of the bread moulds. . . . Firmly he pressed the mould down upon the wax, swiftly raised it. . . . The golden seal was intact again.

DRAWN BY W. R. S. STOTT, TO ILLUSTRATE "THE BLACK MANDARIN," BY SAX ROHMER.



"Expected it!" he snapped. "Excuse me, Knox, but I should like to look out of your bed-room window."

"What!"

"Can I obtain a view of any window above from there?"

"Oh, I see! Yes, the bath-room."

"Excellent!"

He hurried from the room. He vibrated nervous enthusiasm, and I caught the infection. I divined that this was to be one of those "Baghdad nights"—a term of Harley's—such as I had experienced in his company before. Yet, had I known what the night indeed held in store for me, I wonder if my enthusiasm would have cooled?

Harley came back almost immediately, and:

"Have you a pair of tennis shoes?" he asked.

"I have."

"Please get them for me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I am going to climb up the water-spout and into Mr. Hebron's bath-room!"

"Good heavens! But suppose he returns and finds you in his chambers?"

"If he returns, Knox, you will intercept him to give him his letter."

"But how shall I communicate with you?"

"Find a long piece of string, or tie several short pieces together, and I will show you."

He spoke in the rapid, incisive manner of one whose course is clear but whose time is limited. Whilst he took off his boots and put on the tennis shoes, I hunted out a ball of twine. Just as Harley threw widely open the bed-room window, City clocks were chiming the first quarter. He secured the end of the twine to a buttonhole and climbed out upon the ledge. I saw that by the aid of the rain-pipe it was no difficult matter to reach the ledge of the bath-room above, and I saw also that the window was half-open.

"The moment I am in," he said rapidly, "I shall tie the string to anything handy and suitable and set it somewhere where its fall would make a loud noise. Then you will go out and wait on the landing for the possible return of our man. If he comes, ask him in whilst you get his letter. Come back to the bed-room and haul on the string until you hear the crash. Give me a couple of minutes after that."

With which he stretched his foot to a joint in the pipe, secured a firm hold upon it, and was very soon perched on the ledge ten feet above. He pulled the window right down and dived recklessly in. The string remained stationary for a while and then ran out another three feet.

I hurried out to my front door, opened it and listened. No sound reached me from above or below; but almost immediately this silence was interrupted in an unforeseen way. I heard Michael Hebron's door burst open, and:

"Knox! Knox!" came a frenzied whisper. "Up! quickly!"

Utterly at a loss to account for this change of plan, I nevertheless ran upstairs without delay. Paul Harley was standing in the open doorway, a look of absolute horror on his face.

"Knox," he said, grasping my arm, "prepare for a ghastly spectacle!"

He turned and, as I entered, closed the door.

"The first part of our problem is solved," continued Harley. "We know why Michael Hebron did not answer the telephone; and we might have spared ourselves the trouble of duplicating the seal."

I followed him to a room corresponding to that which I used as my study. It was oddly appointed, containing a quantity of Oriental ornaments. The window was closed and the stale air of the place retained a faint, sickly perfume, as if joss-sticks had recently been burned in the room. Indeed, I had noted this queer smell at the moment that I entered the chambers.

But that which blotted out at the time every other impression, and which brought me up with a cry at the threshold, was the figure of a tall, gaunt man lying stretched upon the carpet!

"Good God!" I said—"what does this mean?"

"It means murder!" returned Harley. "He is dead."

"Why," I muttered—"the carpet is wet with blood!"

I stared down at the contorted face. The man wore a light tweed suit, the front of which was hideously smeared with blood. But the expression upon that agonised face was dreadful. Normally, I thought, it had been a strong, harsh face, the skin rather yellow and wrinkled, the brow high and bony, the grey hair fine and scanty; a face perhaps not without nobility. The hands were clenched. A pistol of unfamiliar pattern lay half under a table near the body.

"Why not suicide?" I asked, pointing to the weapon.

"Because he was not shot; he was strangled!" rapped Harley.

"Strangled! But the blood—"

Paul Harley grasped my arm again.

"Come into the next room," he said, "and you will understand."

Dazed, horrified, I followed him to a room which had the appearance of a business office. There was a trail of blood across the threshold.

"Harley!" I whispered, and grew sick. "This place is a charnel house!"

A dead man was seated at the desk!

He wore dress clothes. His arms were stretched out across the desk and his head rested sideways upon an open Telephone Directory, so that as we entered he seemed to be looking up at us, slyly. His left hand almost touched the telephone upon the desk.

For several moments Harley and I stood looking into that horrible room in silence. Then:

"Which of them is Hebron?"

I said hoarsely.

"The other," Harley answered; "the Chinaman—"

"Chinaman! You think the man out there is a Chinaman?"

"I know he is. I knew it after the first glance."

"But," said I, gingerly bending over the dead man at the desk, "this was a very swarthy fellow too, and yellow-skinned—"

"Yes," rapped Harley irritably. "Don't touch him, Knox. We must disturb nothing."

"We must inform the police."

"On the contrary, we must avoid doing so."

"What!"

Paul Harley came nearer to the terrible figure.

"Perhaps a coincidence," he said. "But the directory is open at the page upon which *my* name and number appear! See?"

"Good heavens!"—I was unconsciously speaking in a sort of church whisper—"You are right! But what hell's business took place here to-night? If that pistol was fired—"

"It was fired very recently, Knox. This poor devil is shot through the left lung."

"I have been at work all the evening. I could not have failed to hear—"

"The pistol—a Colt automatic—is fitted with a silencing-tube, an invention presumably designed in the interests of criminals! Let me think! let me think! Here, in these chambers, Knox, lies the clue to a mystery which has puzzled some of the best brains of Europe and America! I feel that every moment wasted here may mean a thousand lives in the near future!"

"But, Harley! this ghastly crime calls for—"

"A mere piece of side-play!" he cried irritably. "Oh! don't think me callous; but the murder of this man, Hebron, is no more than—"

He paused. His expression changed. Turning, he ran out into the lobby, and I followed. A dark overcoat and a crush hat lay upon a chair. Beside the chair a small attaché-case was standing.

"Search the pockets of the overcoat!" he snapped.

Stooping, he opened the brown leather case, took out a queer-looking black garment, and uttered an exclamation of astonishment. It was a long cowl, such as those seen in pictures of the Spanish Inquisition, having eye-holes, but otherwise made to cover the wearer from head to ankles!

"Nothing else!" he said, peering into the case. "Anything in the coat?"

"Yes," I replied dazedly. "This!"

It seemed that I moved in a land of nightmares. The finding of the black cowl was sufficiently astounding, but that which I had extracted from the breast pocket of the overcoat for some reason or another astonished me even more greatly.

This was an amber-coloured envelope, addressed in the odd, square writing which I knew to be that of the woman called Madame de Medici,



He stretched his foot to a joint in the pipe, and secured a firm hold upon it.



and sealed with the scarab seal! The seal was broken, for the envelope had been opened.

Harley snatched it eagerly.

"'Mr. W. Julian,'" he read, "'17, Vale Court, Maida Vale.' We know the name of another of them now!"

"The man who lies dead at the writing desk?"

"No doubt. Make sure of the contents, Knox."



It was a long cowl, such as those seen in pictures of the Spanish Inquisition.

He returned the envelope to me and ran off. Mechanically, I opened it, withdrawing a card identical with that found in the other envelope. Then, his eyes feverishly bright, Harley came running back, carrying over his arm another of the black cowl!

"Do you understand, Knox?" he cried. "The man Julian evidently came here on his way to call for Hebron. They quarrelled, and——"

He stopped speaking. A clock somewhere near was chiming the half hour.

"Thirty minutes to reach the house of Madame de Medici!" he said.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### WE VISIT CHINATOWN.

ST. PAUL'S was left behind, and we were racing through deserted City streets which during the day were all but impassable. The Daimler which had been drawn up outside Harley's office, in accordance with his instructions, devoured miles of East End thoroughfares with gluttonous speed. During the first five minutes or so of that wild midnight journey, my friend remained silent, and, divining that he was endeavouring to perfect his plan of operation, I did not disturb him. Then:

"The fact that material for which a dozen men have been scouring the world should have fallen into our hands like this," he said, "almost overwhelms me!"

"The long arm of coincidence in operation."

"Coincidence, Knox? Where is the coincidence? That the man known as Michael Hebron should die by the hand of another member of the group to-night is a trick of Fate, certainly; but you don't suppose his selection of those chambers above yours was a coincidence?"

"I had counted it one."

"You were wrong. Our association is sufficiently well known, Knox, in such circles, to explain it. He leased the set above you in order to spy on me! You wondered, quite naturally, why I made no investigation of the ghastly crime committed there to-night. I will explain. This international quest of the Black Mandarin, in which my own services have only been requisitioned within the last two months, has already become with me, as with others before me, a positive obsession. I regard this man's existence as a menace to the peace of the world, although I am by no means confident that his removal would eradicate the evil. Another, no doubt, would assume control of the secret machine."

"But think of it, Knox—the keenest men of our own, as well as agents of other Powers, have focussed on this thing for years. The United States is keenly interested, of course. The trail of the Black Mandarin has been laid from coast to coast, and a wave of crime, varying in character almost from day to day, has swept over that country. The most brilliant man that ever came out of Washington, Raymond McCabe, practically broke himself on the problem. He failed utterly to establish the identity of the Black Mandarin, who recently disappeared from the States as mysteriously as he had arrived. That he existed and assuredly controlled powerful diverse groups of criminals and others whose schemes were inimical to American interests is proved without the shadow of a doubt. But beyond that, neither McCabe nor anybody else could penetrate a yard."

"This society, if it is a society, must be a wonderful organisation."

"Undoubtedly it is. McCabe came into touch with it time and time again, but always with the same negative result, until finally, either in despair or fear, he abandoned the task and retired from the service altogether. But before he retired he secured one very tangible clue which the events of to-night have made specially significant. It came into his possession during a row between rival tongs in 'Frisco, but, unfortunately, several hours too late for it to be of any service. It may have influenced McCabe's decision to retire from the obviously unequal contest."

"And what was this clue, Harley?"

"A card with the figure of a mandarin, in silhouette, upon it, and a time and date written underneath!"

"The same——"

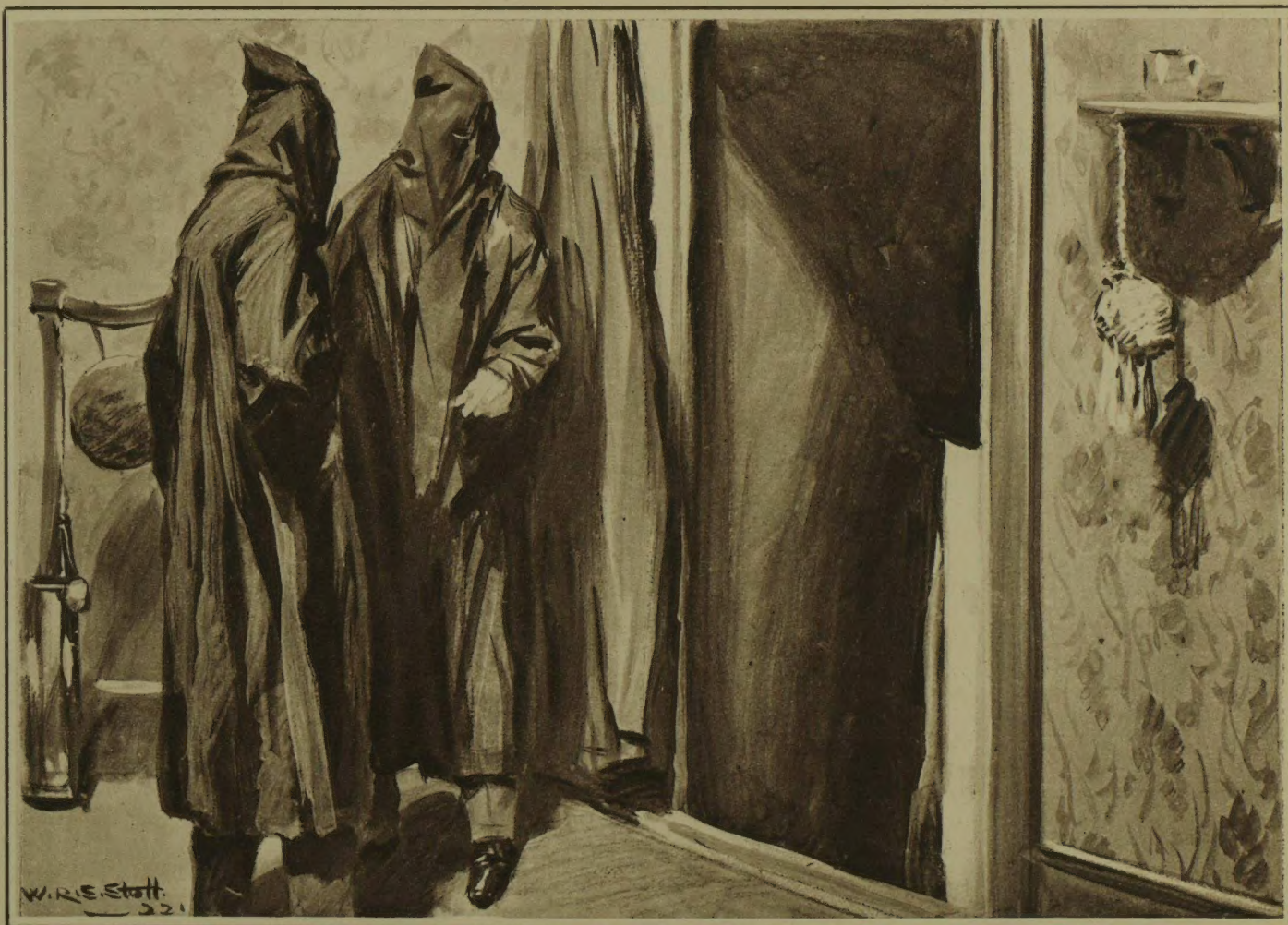
"Exactly, Knox! Imagine my feelings, therefore, when I found an exactly similar card to-night? I had already devoted considerable attention to the mysterious Madame de Medici, who had crossed my path on several occasions in the past and whom I knew to have some sort of relations with China. Here came proof positive that she was an agent of the Black Mandarin!"

"Surely her method of communicating with her fellow conspirators is a careless one?"

"What! a District Messenger? My dear fellow, excluding such unlikely possibilities as that which came to pass to-night, no method could be safer! You must know that I employ them regularly in most delicate affairs. No, I continue to regard Madame as above reproach."

"And what are your plans for to-night?" I asked.

We were racing along Commercial Road East, as a glance from the window showed me. In contrast to the daytime activity of this thoroughfare, its present air of desolation was extraordinary. It offered a vista of shuttered shops and blind windows which brought home to me the strangeness of our journey. This indeed was a "Baghdad night," and our business was with dangerous, nocturnal creatures.



The curtain was drawn aside, and I found myself staring down stone steps.

"Up to a point," Harley replied, "my plans are simple enough. From that point onward—I have no plans!"

"But explain," I urged. "You have brought the cowl——"

"And I have brought the cards!"



"Am I to suppose that you intend to penetrate to the meeting which, I assume, has been called for to-night at the house of this woman?"

He turned to me, smiling, and:

"You think it madness, Knox?" he said. "But consider the facts. The first is clear as daylight: the members of this organisation are known, naturally, to their chief, but not to one another!"

"Why do you think so?"

"Think so! It is evident! Julian and Hebron obviously shared confidences, but if the remaining members were acquainted one with another, why the cowl?"

"Good heavens! of course! Unless——"

"Well?" he rapped impatiently.

"Unless the gathering were convened to meet some *non-member*——"

"A prisoner! a trial!"

He cried out the words excitedly; but the next moment he was shaking his head.

"No, Knox, it won't do. The cowl is as old as the history of secret societies. The practical utility of the device is obvious. But neither Madame de Medici nor her formidable superior could descend to anything so dramatically unnecessary as the trial of a captured enemy." He stared at me significantly. "There would be no trial, Knox!"

I was silent for a moment. Then:

"Your first point granted," said I, "you hope to obtain access by impersonating the dead man, Hebron?"

"Exactly."

"But why take the risk? Wessex is here, with a party from New Scotland Yard. Why not simply raid the place?"

"For two reasons," he replied. "First: we have not one scrap of evidence to justify a raid. Second: I could learn more by being present at that meeting than we should ever learn by interrogating prisoners—assuming we could find an excuse for making any!"

"I see. But the second cowl? The absence of Julian might lead to dangerous inquiries."

"Wessex shall be Julian!"

"Wessex shall not!" I said hotly. "You owe this night's business to me, Harley, and this being so—I see it through with you."

"But, my dear fellow——" he began.

"Have I failed you so lamentably on other occasions that you have come to distrust me? Besides, I know something of the East; Wessex knows nothing."

Harley brought his hand down heavily on my knee.

"Forgive me, old man!" he said. "No thought of distrust was in my mind, and you know it. I simply regarded Wessex as the proper, official person to accompany me. But I admit, now, that you are likely to be of greater service, and if the risk, which I don't disguise, appeals to you—say no more."

"Good enough," I replied. "It's settled. But right at the outset I see big difficulties. We know absolutely nothing of the methods of procedure usual at these meetings. They may partake of the character of Masonic rites."

"We chance it," said Harley grimly, as the chauffeur turned the car and drew up before Limehouse Police Station. "We have five minutes."

Inspector Wessex, whom I knew well, came hurrying out to meet us.

"I began to wonder if you were coming, Mr. Harley," he cried. "There is something afoot to-night beyond a doubt, but it isn't at the house of Zani Chada—"

"Then where is it?"

"At Kwee's, behind Ropemaker's Fields."

"How far is Kwee's from the house of Zani Chada?—and who is Kwee?"

"It nearly backs on to it. Kwee is employed in a dry-goods store in Pennyfields, but we've been watching him lately. Six or seven men, not natives of the district, have gone in there to-night. That is to say, six have been definitely reported by the chaps watching the house."

"How do they arrive—singly? in parties?"

"Singly."

"What sort of men?"

"They all appear to be respectable; in fact some of them might pass for gentlemen. Several have carried handbags."

"There you are, Knox!" said Harley excitedly; then, to Wessex: "Have you been able to see who admitted them?"

"No. It wouldn't be possible, without attracting attention."

"And no one has gone to the house occupied by Madame de Medici?"

"No one. It is all in darkness."

"Get in, Wessex," rapped Harley, who had conducted this conversation through the open window of the car. "We have less than two minutes! Tell the man to stop at the top end of Three Colt Street, by the church."

These instructions were given, and Inspector Wessex, looking very puzzled, joined us in the car, which immediately started.

"You see," continued Harley, "by a pure accident—a murder, to be exact——"

"A murder!" cried Wessex.

"Yes. But I haven't time to explain," said Harley drily. "By virtue of this accident, I have obtained the means of penetrating to the meeting which is taking place to-night. Mr. Knox is coming with me. The raid squad is posted near the house of Chada?"

"No. They are standing by at the station."

"Get them nearer the moment we have gone in. A pistol shot will be the signal. Ha! here we are."

"I take it," said Wessex, as Harley jumped out at the corner of the gloomy, deserted street, "that you have got a strong line on Madame de Medici at last?"

"A very strong line," was the reply. "Wessex!" he grasped the Scotland Yard man by the arm—"she is the link with the Black Mandarin!"

"Great Scott!" cried Wessex. "For God's sake be careful, Mr. Harley!"

"You may rely upon it! Bring the attaché-case, Knox. Now, Wessex, direct me, and then get back to bring up the others."

"Take the third turning on the left. There is one lamp in it. Well, just past the lamp is a narrow courtway. At the end is a door. That's Kwee's."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE HOUSE OF GONGS.

A KEEN breeze from the north was blowing as the Daimler moved off into West India Dock Road, and a church clock—St. Dunstan's, I thought—was chiming the hour of two. There are some people, I doubt not, whom the night aspect of Chinatown would chill with apprehension, but for me ordinarily it held no terrors, this jungle of bricks and mortar lying to right and left. The greater part of London's Asiatic colony is harmless enough, and those members who are noxious lurk deep in secret burrows to which the stranger must penetrate if he would toy with the darker side of Eastern life.

Angry clouds drifted across the moon and there was a wintry bite in the air. The artery of Dockland, as I took a parting glance along it, was by no means deserted, despite the lateness of the hour. Several big steamers were on the point of sailing, and I observed a party of Lascars heading for the dock gates. A string of lorries, too, drawn by a puffing traction-engine, came rattling along the unevenly paved roadway, leaving a trail of sparks behind both above and below. There was something cheery in the red glow from the little furnace reflected upon the faces of the two men in the cab.

Fitfully a pale moon shone upon mean houses, shuttered, dark, seemingly uninhabited. I knew something of the night life of this quarter, yet it was no easy matter mentally to people these silent shells of buildings with wakeful Asiatics. Within a hundred yards of me were those who gambled, who smoked opium, who waxed riotous upon spirits sold on unlicensed premises. Yet Chinatown seemed to be asleep. In a lull of the wind sounds reached me from the docks, as we set out towards the house of Kwee, metallic sounds, the clangour of engines, the hooting of some tug coming out of the Pool, but from the Causeway area came no voice, no light.

The wind howled, elfin, overhead; a few flying drops of rain touched me; and the moon disappeared for good behind a bank of storm clouds.

"Whoever is watching the place is wonderfully well hidden," said I, perhaps not without apprehension, as we turned into Ropemaker's Fields.

"It is their business to be," Harley rejoined. "I should have liked to change my appearance, Knox, had time allowed. I am wondering why visitors go to this house and not to Chada's."

"Who is Chada?"

"The owner of the establishment at present occupied by Madame de Medici. He got into trouble with the police not so long ago, in connection with the death of a man named Peters—a member of that unpleasant but useful profession, 'Copper's narks.' Chada is a wealthy Eurasian, and is now missing. Here is the lamp—here is the court, Knox—and there's the door!"

We looked along the alley beyond the street lamp, narrow, dark, and uninviting.

"Why the precaution of the cowl if we have to show ourselves to the doorkeeper?" murmured Harley.

"Perhaps we are supposed to put them on here, before knocking?"

"Ah! quite possibly. Even at the cost of being considered eccentric, let us do so!"

Thereupon, opening the leather case which had belonged to the man Julian, I drew out the two hideous disguises. Both Harley and I wore soft hats, and these we easily crushed into the case. When, a moment later, in the dimly lighted passage, I surveyed my companion, I could scarcely repress a start of nervous revulsion. Although I knew it to be Paul Harley, this sinister, black figure, whose eyes gleamed at me evilly through the slits of the cowl, was one to chill the most intrepid heart.

"Horrible!" he said, surveying me with a distaste I doubt not as keen as my own. "I fear I shall never thoroughly like you again, Knox!"

It was so characteristic of the man, this light jesting in perilous hours, that an uncomfortable pessimism which had threatened to conquer me fled as by magic. We were about to enter a den abandoned to the uses of those who plotted against States and to whom human lives were no more sacred than the blades of grass one crushes underfoot. Perhaps memories of that ghastly shambles in the chambers above my own had been haunting me, but now, reflecting how hotly I had volunteered, and recalling the fact that a raid squad from Scotland Yard would ere long be surrounding the place, I found a new outlook.

Harley approached the door, which boasted two dirty stone steps.

"Have your ticket ready!" he murmured softly, and, raising his hand, he beat one stroke upon the knocker.

A curious fact immediately became evident. The knocker was muffled.

"Ah!" he breathed. "What now?"

For the result, I think, neither was prepared. A faint sound from above drew my glance upward. And there, descending upon a length of twine, came a little Chinese basket of plaited split cane! Of the one, concealed in some upper room, who lowered it, no glimpse could be obtained.

I grasped Harley's arm, pointing; and we watched the basket descend until it swung gently to and fro in the sheltered alley, about shoulder-high. Harley grasped it and looked quickly inside. But the basket was empty.

For my part, I doubt if the meaning of the thing would ever have dawned upon me. But my friend, muttering something under his breath, produced the card bearing the mandarin figure and dropped it in the basket!

At the same time he plucked at the sleeve of my cowl urgently, and, realising what was expected of me, I deposited the second card beside the first. As I did so, Harley twitched the string—and the basket was immediately drawn up! I bent to Harley's ear.

"What was it you said?" I whispered.

[Continued on page 14.]





Sinbad the Sailor: On the Island that was a Living Monster.

FROM THE PICTURE BY ARNOLD MELLO.





Sinbad the Sailor: The Roc and its Egg.

FROM THE PICTURE BY ARNOLD MELLO.





Sinbad in Danger in the Valley of Jewels: A Serpent Seeks his Life.

FROM THE PICTURE BY ARNOLD MELLO





In the Valley of Jewels: A Serpent as Worm for an Early Bird.

FROM THE PICTURE BY ARNOLD MELLO.





"PRAYER ARDENT OPENS HEAVEN."

FROM THE SALON PICTURE, "PRIÈRE," BY EDGARD MAXENCE.



"I said, 'A device used by the Hip Sing Tong,'" he replied in an undertone. "The door will be opened mechanically, I expect."

His expectation was realised. Faintly was borne to my ears, as if from a subterranean cavern, the booming of a distant gong. Following a short interval, during which I listened for a repetition of the mysterious sound, but heard only that of the wind howling along the Thames reaches and of the muted bombilation of the quarter, there came a sort of rusty creaking as of some heavy weight being raised. This ceased, but was followed by a metallic click, the door swung open, revealing a pitch-black interior.

I hesitated, whereupon Harley seized my arm and I found myself in the stuffy darkness of the room beyond.

Scarcely had we crossed the threshold, when the door reclosed, almost silently, as it had opened. The rusty creaking was renewed, whilst we stood there wondering what to do. It ceased—and an electric lamp became lighted immediately above us.

I was feeling very far from comfortable, and my first impulse was to glance at the door. I learned that although, from outside, it had the aspect of a very ordinary, common kind of door, inside it presented a totally different appearance. In the first place it was extraordinarily thick and heavy, and in the second, a sort of iron frame, working in metal grooves, had been lowered on chains from above: thus forming a second or inner door.

The room in which I found myself resembled many others I had seen in Chinese houses, except for the presence of the electric lamp and the portcullis. That is to say, it was scantily and tawdrily furnished. An

Chada's! The police have suspected it for a long time; but it is evidently masked very cleverly."

We descended the narrow steps, Harley leading. They led down to a small and dirty cellar in which the invisible Kwee seemed to store a quantity of valueless lumber. Light was furnished by a gas-jet projecting from the brick wall. A doorway which possessed no visible lintel or casement, and which I suspected ordinarily to be indistinguishable from the rest of the wall, gaped invitingly. Beyond, I could see a rough tunnel, resembling a mine gallery, its chilly gloom enlivened by the presence of another gas-light set some twelve or fifteen feet along.

Harley entered the cutting without hesitation, and I perforce followed him. We were arrived immediately under the light at the time that a familiar rusty, creaking noise caused me to glance back.

The entrance to the tunnel was closed!

Remembering the signal agreed upon, my skin grew clammy as I reflected that no sound of a pistol shot fired in this drain would reach the upper world. If suspicion should touch those we were come to seek, or—hideous thought—had already touched them, we should be trapped like rats!

The tunnel, having sloped down to the point at which the light was situated, now sloped upward, terminating in a cellar considerably larger than Kwee's. This contained a great store of wine, was electrically lighted and well ordered. Evidently we were under the house of Zani Chada. Upstairs we proceeded, thus far having come upon no sign of immediate human presence.

A little pantry gave access to a corridor. At the end, where I had a



"Well, Mr. Harley," she said sweetly, "will you not present your friend?"

advertisement for somebody's cigarettes ornamented the mantel, and the furniture was mere lumber. The only truly Oriental thing I could see was one of those plaited flasks, with bright silken tassels, which hung from a common wooden bracket on which rested a figured mug bearing the legend: "A present from Southend."

On a table by one wall I noticed quite a number of small hand-bags and attaché-cases, and accordingly I placed there the one which I held in my hand. Nothing further happened, and the room was very silent. There was no window opening on the court, and, staring at the iron-barred door, it became terrifyingly plain that, simple though we might have found it to get into the house of Kwee, to get out, failing the aid of the unseen gate-keeper, was frankly impossible.

Harley, an unrecognisable figure in his unpleasant disguise, was staring about him eagerly. Suddenly he stood still, jerking his head in the direction of a rough curtain which I took to conceal some opening. A gong hung beside the curtain, the wooden striker attached to it by a loop of cord.

"This is the dressing-room, Knox," Harley whispered. "We announce ourselves as soon as we are ready!"

"Do you think so?" I murmured nervously.

"For what other purpose is the gong placed there? At any rate, I am going to risk it!"

Stepping forward, he took up gong and hammer, and struck a loud, harsh note, sounding very sharp and staccato in the small room. In the ensuing silence we both stood listening intently. Then, from somewhere beyond—from a long way off, it seemed—the signal was answered.

A deep, lingering gong note, amphoric and reverberant, came back to us.

At the same moment, with some slight rattling of the brass rings, the curtain was drawn aside, and I found myself staring down stone steps into a dimly lighted cellar!

"I see!" Harley murmured. "There is a passage through to Zani

glimpse of a strangely appointed hall or lobby, a Chinaman, in native dress, was waiting to receive us!

## CHAPTER VI.

### MADAME DE MEDICI.

IF I was threatened with panic at this moment, I believe that I succeeded in concealing the fact well enough, but I was assuredly grateful of the shelter afforded by my monkish cowl. Harley spoke never a word, but in silence advanced along the corridor to meet the Chinaman. I followed; nor do I scruple to confess that I first assured myself of the possibility of speedily withdrawing from beneath the hampering robe the revolver which I carried.

I had not supposed that Limehouse could afford the spectacle of such a hallway as that in which I found myself. Evidently the house of Zani Chada was a survival of the days when Chinatown was not—of an earlier generation which rode out to the Essex flats by chaise or on horseback. Its furnishing, however, was unique, oddly blending the manner of a Roman mansion with that of an Oriental palace.

Here were pillars and a painted ceiling, a great staircase softly carpeted, and chairs of Arab woodwork. As we came to the end of the corridor, the servant raised his hand, palm forward, in salutation, at the same time inclining his head.

Paul Harley returned the salute, and I followed his example; at which the Chinaman silently indicated two ornate, carved chairs, bowed, left us, and walked slowly up the staircase, his soft slippers sinking into the pile of the carpet as into moss. The moment that we found ourselves alone:

"Knox!" Harley whispered urgently—"did you note how he stared at our palms?"

"Our palms?—no," I muttered. "Why should he do so?"



"Why indeed!" Harley murmured.

He began to glance about him furtively. I should say, at this point, that my friend possessed a sort of sixth sense, by means of which he was sometimes enabled to detect the presence of imminent danger, although there might be no visible evidence to confirm it. As we waited there in



I had the utmost difficulty in grasping what was asked of me.

that queer hallway I think this uncanny prescience touched him; I think he was seeking, desperately, to evolve some new plan of action.

However, if this were so, he failed. Silent as a phantom, the Chinaman who had met us descended the stairs, his yellow face expressionless, bowed, and indicated that we should follow him.

Harley's face, of course, I was unable to see, but through the slits in his cowl, he flashed me a glance the significance of which was lost upon me. But that he intended to convey a warning of some sort, I was sure. Not knowing what was in his mind, not knowing what flaw he had detected in our daring plan, I followed him up those silent stairs in the carpet of which one's feet sank deeply, with a chill of foreboding at my heart colder than any I had known that night.

The place was informed with a faint, incense-like smell which, as we reached the top of the staircase, I recognised to be similar to that in the chambers of Michael Hebron.

A curtain was drawn aside; we passed along a short corridor illuminated by a golden-shaded lamp in the form of a flambeau upheld by an exquisite ivory statuette. The walls were covered with tapestry and the floor was over-laid with rugs and skins. Our guide rapped twice upon a closed door, opened it and stood aside, bowing.

Harley entered and I followed, to find myself looking upon a scene so grotesque, and in some way so sinister, that its reality almost eluded me, and I felt as one who dreamed an evil dream.

We were in a long, low-ceilinged room, an Adam room such as is found in old English houses. I think at some time it had been used as a dining-room. There were several very fine oil paintings on the wall, and the massive furniture was antique and valuable. Around a long council table a party of ten was assembled, nine men and one woman; at least I assumed the nine cowed figures to be those of men. All were standing, facing us, hands upraised in the salute with which the Chinese servant had greeted us on our arrival. They had risen from the chairs in which they had been seated, and I found all my attention to be focussed upon the woman who stood at the far end of the long table.

She wore a black robe, so designed as to conceal no line of her perfect white shoulders. By her pose and the curve of her red lips, I judged her to be beautiful, despite the presence of a narrow mask through which gleamed the most extraordinary amber-coloured eyes which I had ever met with in a human being. Her jet-black hair was dressed with classic simplicity; and as she stood there, one jewelled hand resting lightly

upon the table, I knew that this was the notorious Madame de Medici; and her power for evil or for good I could no longer doubt. I thought that I had never seen a more arresting figure.

Harley raised his hand, and I did likewise; and in the very act of this salute I observed something, something which seemed to check the beating of my heart, of which at first I did not grasp the entire significance, whilst realising that it boded no good.

I have said that Madame de Medici stood alone at one end of the long table, so that at the moment of entering I had assumed her to be president of this singular gathering. Now, I saw that, facing her at the end of the table nearer to us, was a great, high-backed ebony chair, dragon-legged and golden-cushioned. This, and another chair on the right of it, were the only vacant places at the board.

Palpably either Harley or I, in other words either Hebron or Julian, was expected to preside over this meeting!

How I, alone, should have dealt with the situation, I know not, but my fear, already great, was now increased by a sudden inarticulate murmuring which greeted our return of the salutation. The eyes peering at us through the slits of black cowls seemed to my excited imagination to become like the eyes of wild animals.

I had my hand upon my robe ready to make a wild plunge for the revolver which lay in my pocket. I think I should have turned and fled, but that the amber eyes of Madame de Medici seemed to hold me hypnotically, seemed to forbid me to move. Never in the whole of an adventurous life, much of its adventure due to my share in Paul Harley's cases, had I known a moment to compare with this! I knew, as certainly as if ten voices had denounced us, that in some way our plans were at fault. I knew that Paul Harley's sixth sense had told him of this already, so that I was astounded when he walked forward to the throne-like chair, indicating that I should take the place upon his right.

As we advanced, every head around that board turned in the direction of Madame de Medici. She bowed slightly, and the whole assembly became seated.

I had never once taken my gaze from her face, or rather, from her eyes. Indeed, I scarcely felt capable of doing so. I groped for the chair and sat down mechanically. Once seated, however, furtively I pulled the black robe aside and rested my hand upon the revolver in my pocket. Madame de Medici remained standing. A complete silence fell. Faintly, I could detect a perfume which, later, I was to identify with that diffused by the amber envelope.

The glance of those tiger eyes was directed now upon my friend; and, as if ordered silently to do so, the cowed heads turned once more in our direction, but this time their intolerable stares were focussed wholly upon Paul Harley. The influence of the beautiful Circe being temporarily removed from me, I became my own master in a measure.

[Continued on page 18.]



"Neatly and efficiently sand-bagged from behind!"





### THROUGH THE CRYSTAL WALL: "LA BELLE MISSOUS."

What of La Belle Missous and the pageantry about her? Who is her rival in our picture, the eighteenth-century Countess, with her negro page, her parrots, and her powdered hair? Her dainty inscience invokes the spirit of her age, and bids us admire those elegancies and artificialities, unknown to moderns, which create heroines for poets and dramatists of these and other days. La Belle and La Comtesse are two of the visions which M. George Barbier, the famous French artist, was inspired to set down as illustrations to M. Albert Flament's prose poem, "Personnages de Comédie," which has been published by M. Meynial, 30, Boulevard Haussmann,

Paris. The book is a very beautiful production—one to be treasured—and the illustrations which it contains are not only exquisite examples of the delicately fantastic art of M. George Barbier, and his fine feeling for the spirit of any period, but are extremely interesting as proof of the perfection of the art of colour-printing. The reproductions are from wood blocks by M. F. L. Schmied. M. George Barbier is the young artist whose designs for the costumes of "La Dernière Nuit de Don Juan" aroused so much admiration in Paris. The book is only published in a limited edition, each copy being numbered and signed. The argument of "Personnages de

[Continued opposite.





## THROUGH THE CRYSTAL WALL: "LA COMTESSE."

*Continued.*

Comédie" is the poetic fancy that the dream world is peopled by characters created by the poets, and that, though we hold them dear by reason of their grace and beauty, they must still affect us with a suggestion of the suffering endured by the creative artists who gave them birth. These "Personnages de Comédie" dwell in a land separated from the world of reality by deep ravines resembling extinct volcanoes, and M. Flament imagines that we may gaze through the wall of crystal at the landscape of that far country and the folk who inhabit it. At times, he fancies, we may see our well-loved heroes and heroines of fiction and poetry. They actually

embark on frail galleys and start off on a hopeless crusade, seeking to win us our freedom by dragging us away from the grip of reality. Sometimes, too, we may leave our own place, and fly to meet them—though the adventure can only be a brief one. But when it is over, we come back to our life in the material world with new eyes: we can see that we ourselves are but the characters in a still greater Comedy. Perhaps, M. Flament suggests, this is the fault of woman. She is naturally inclined to play a part, and cannot avoid the fate of being ruled by caprice—but let no man boast that he is superior to his companion!

*Reproduced from the beautiful Colour-book, "Personnages de Comédie," published by Meynial, 30, Boulevard Haussmann, Paris.*



I glanced aside at Harley. His face I could not see, but that he also had his pistol in readiness was a fact which I detected immediately.

There was a large antique clock upon the mantelshelf, registering ten minutes after two, and so seemingly irrelevant are the things which linger in one's memory that I can recall to the present moment the peculiar key in which this clock ticked; a deep, discreetly sombre key, mellow with age. Meanwhile, I wondered what was to befall and what we should gain by continuing the farce further, since we were as surely unmasked as if we had stood undisguised among that grotesque gathering. Then Madame de Medici spoke.

Of this extraordinary woman I cannot hope to convey any just impression, but it is well that God has fashioned but few like her. Her voice had a silvery note which must have won for her international fame had she chosen the stage as a vocation. She had languorous, almost insolent, movements; feline, indescribably fascinating. Her entire personality appealed direct to the senses, like incense or barbaric music, or the rhythm of a pagan dance.

"My friends," she said, speaking very softly, but her eyes flashing a lightning message from face to face, "our company is now complete."

A faint murmur interrupted her. The man on my immediate right was breathing heavily, and the fact came home to me in a flash of intuition that if I feared these cowed mysteries about me, their fear was at least as great as my own. At their identity, or even their nationality, I could not guess. But that they were swayed each and every one by the personality of the woman standing at the end of the table was beyond dispute. To her they looked for guidance, in her they counted upon leadership. Ignoring the murmur, she continued to speak.

"I propose," she said, "that we adjourn to the lower room in accordance with custom."

Some hidden meaning underlay the words; there was comprehension in the very movements of the cowed heads. Something touched my knee, and glancing swiftly downward, I saw this to be Harley's hand, in which he grasped a pistol. Divining his meaning, I withdrew my revolver from my pocket and held it in readiness below the table.

"If you will follow me," concluded Madame de Medici, "I will lead the way."

Gracefully, languidly, she turned and walked towards a door at the far end of the room. The nine men around the table rose, pushed back their chairs, and followed her. Their anxiety to be gone was unmistakable. Harley stood up also. For once, I think, he was momentarily at a loss. He knew that he had made a mistake, but no doubt he counted upon the party surrounding the house, and no doubt, also, he felt himself handicapped by the presence of a woman. As the company turned their backs upon us—

"Knox!" he whispered, "did you see how they all stared at our palms?"

"Yes," I returned. "Quick! What are you going to do?"

In the wake of the graceful figure, the nine cowed men had now disappeared from the room.

"We are discovered," he said; "we shall learn nothing. In some way we have blundered. So—first to get rid of this damned cowl!"

We were now alone in the long apartment, not one of the retreating conspirators having given us so much as a backward glance. Harley threw off the black robe and stood, pistol in hand, looking about him. I also discarded my hampering garment, and was about to speak, when an extraordinary thing occurred.

So thickly were the rooms and the corridors of this house carpeted that no sound of footsteps was perceptible, for which reason it was impossible to determine in what direction the party had gone. Now, as we stared at the distant doorway by which they had made their exits, Madame de Medici, her mask discarded, re-entered.

The amber eyes were half-veiled by their black lashes; her lips were curved in a mocking smile. She was even more beautiful than I had supposed, and—

"Well, Mr. Harley," she said sweetly, "will you not present your friend whom you have brought to see me?"

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE ROOM OF THE CLOTH-OF-GOLD.

THE task of recording the events which immediately followed is one which I approach with hesitation. I had slipped my revolver back into my pocket at the moment that Madame de Medici re-entered the room. Harley, too, had concealed his pistol. To him, as to me, I doubt not, recognition of defeat had come. Legally we were at the mercy of this strangely beautiful woman, who now, sinking gracefully down upon a cushioned settee, lighted a cigarette and surveyed us through lowered lashes.

Even had Harley been attached to the official police, his position at this moment must have been an unenviable one. The best that we could hope for now was that the men stationed around the house should succeed in tracing some of the members of this mysterious organisation as they departed, for the woman's bewildering self-possession had cut the ground from under our feet.

Watching her as she reclined there, I thought that she found amusement in our dilemma; and knowing, for I could not doubt the fact, that she was involved in a grim conspiracy which had taxed the Secret Services of four nations, I realised that beneath this graceful, cat-like indolence a dangerously powerful spirit must lie concealed.

This was no idle masquerade upon which we had intruded, but a scene in a secret drama which one day might involve the whole of the Western world. Long as I had known Paul Harley, I had never seen him so palpably nonplussed. He was angry, and could not disguise the fact; but he knew himself helpless and reduced to a battle of wits with a woman.

"Well, Mr. Harley," said Madame de Medici, "I shall not offend you by pretending to misunderstand what has brought you here to-night." She paused, glancing at the cigarette which she held between her fingers. "For a long time now you have subjected me to surveillance. Because, perhaps strangely, I choose to live in this house, you have had me followed when I have visited my friends in the more civilised quarters of London. To-night"—she smiled, gazing fixedly at me whilst she



I saw the spirit of the Yellow People stand naked before me—and it was a great and a powerful spirit.



continued to address Harley—"you have really gone too far. It is almost absurd."

"It is more than absurd," he returned, watching her. "It is positively offensive. I apologise, Madame de Medici."

She scarcely glanced at him, keeping her extraordinary amber-coloured eyes, which now were fully open, turned persistently in my direction.



It was Paul Harley, carrying an electric torch!

A taunting smile rested upon her lips, and, watching her as she lay there in her lithe beauty, I told myself that Aspasia, Leontium, Sappho, Faustine, Semiramis, Irene, must surely have been such women as this. Yet I found a joy in contemplating her. Nor did I recognise how completely the details of the scene were fading from my ken; how, little by little, my world was dwindling, seeming to begin and to end in two darkly fringed pools of amber. Madame de Medici continued to address Harley and continued to watch me.

"You have avoided me socially, Mr. Harley, yet you visit my house uninvited."

"And find you entertaining strange company!" rejoined Harley, with repressed venom.

"It is a secret society which meets at my house!" she explained coolly, and smiled at me the while.

Suddenly, the fact that the speaker's regard was directed elsewhere seemed to attract Harley's attention, for—

"Knox!" he said sharply, so that I started as if awakened from a doze. "What was that address in Maida Vale which we were given to-night?"

Indeed, I had the utmost difficulty in grasping what was asked of me. I became conscious of a positive but unfamiliar stupidity, as well as of a disinclination to tax my brain with what appeared to be a weighty problem.

"Try to remember, Knox," Harley added. "It is important."

I cannot recall having once removed my eyes from contemplation of the bewitching face of Madame de Medici from the moment when she had seated herself on the settee up to that when Harley asked me this apparently irrelevant question. A conviction, not wholly unpleasant, that the whole scene was unreal had begun to take possession of me. Fear had gone. I recognised that these people had nothing to gain by harming us. Embarrassment I had experienced when first our equivocal position had become apparent to me, but now this had given place to a sort of acute, æsthetic delight in the beauty of the woman who lay there on the settee, watching me smilingly with those strangely long, amber eyes.

Harley began to speak again, but I scarcely heeded his words. Regarded in retrospect, this apathy which, unchecked, I permitted to steal upon me seems almost incredible. But I was handicapped; I was falling, an easy victim, in a contest fought with strange weapons. To-day, armed with my new knowledge, I think I should give a different account of myself.

Dimly, I could hear Harley's voice, but, as though I had eaten *hashish*, he seemed to be speaking from a great distance; whilst, on the contrary, Madame de Medici seemed bodily to have approached nearer to me or I to her.

It was all a delusion, of course, as I have since recognised, and in upon it, as my wonder grew and the lure of the sorceress wrapped me more closely about, burst a sudden sharp cry from my friend. Almost, the

spell was broken—almost, but not quite. I clenched my fists, as I remember distinctly . . . I heard the sound of a fall.

And now I have to relate how I failed my friend in direst need, for whilst, in a sort of subconscious fashion, I realised that he was calling upon me for aid, I also realised—and knew a swift, sickly terror—the depth of my subjection to the uncanny power which lay in the eyes of Madame de Medici.

I had experienced it when first she had glanced at me that night, but now I experienced it to the full. I could not remove my eyes—I could not turn aside! I was entrapped in some strange magic; knew I was entrapped, resented my impotency, yet lacked the strength to combat the spell cast upon me!

My mentality became sharply divided. I told myself that the perfume in the apartment, which at first had been no more than faintly perceptible, now was grown so oppressive that I was likely to swoon. Never having succumbed to this characteristically feminine ailment, I had no previous experience to guide me. But I had been put under an anæsthetic in a military hospital in Singapore, and my present sensations closely resembled those which I had experienced on that occasion. First, the gradual loss of interest in everything about me, a sensation as though veil after veil were being lowered, slowly obscuring the scene. It was similar.

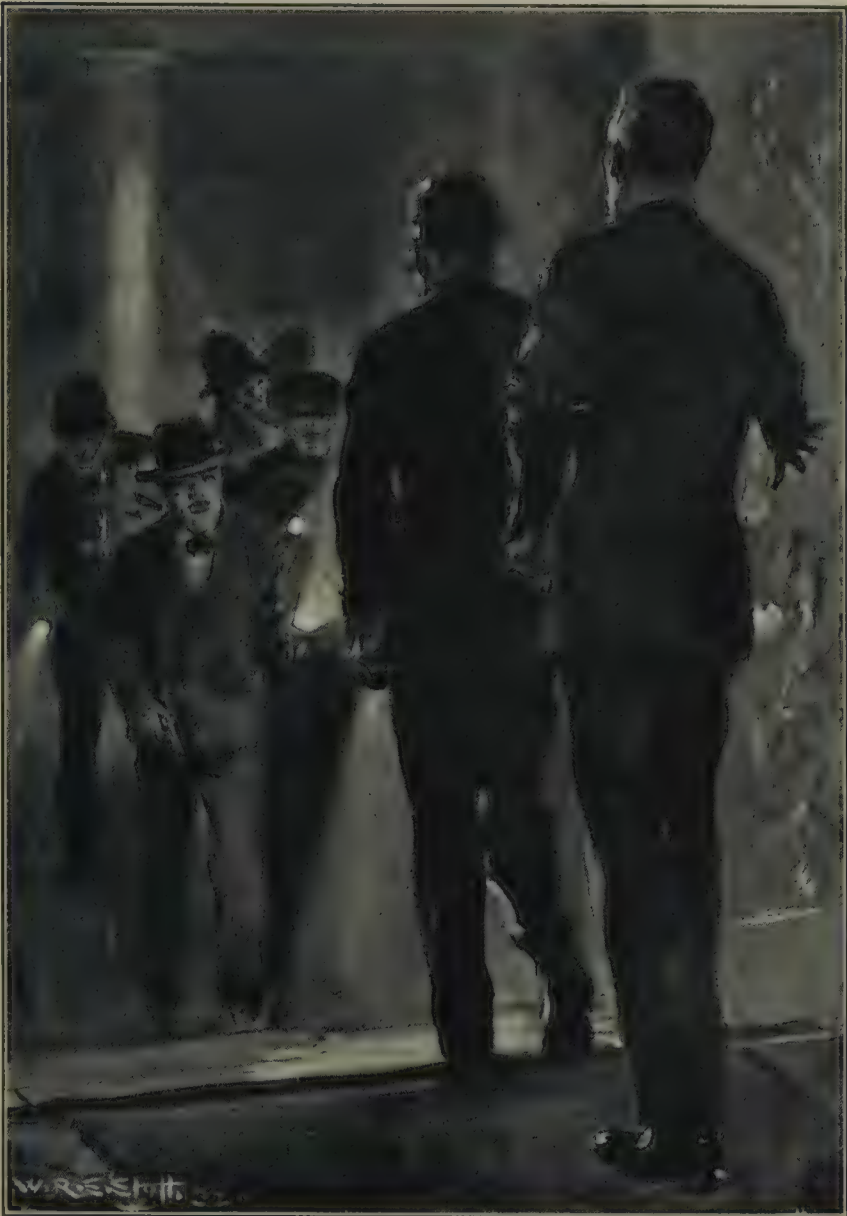
In Singapore, my last flicker of interest had centred upon a broken button in the surgeon's white overall. Now it centred upon the liquid amber eyes of Madame de Medici. It was strange, this reasoning with myself, whilst weakly I succumbed to the influence that was overpowering me.

I seemed to be sinking lower and lower in a cloud of incense, and to be looking up as from the bottom of a great pit, through shifting, tenuous vapours, at amber eyes bending over me, far above. Then the unforgettable silver-bell voice called to me softly, and I mounted out of the darkness towards the light, to find myself in a room canopied with cloth-of-gold.

A Madonna, which I knew for an Old Master, looked down compassionately from the wall upon a garishly cushioned divan where Madame de Medici reclined, watching me with that slow smile which rendered her carmine lips so alluring. She dropped her cigarette into a silver bowl on a table by her side, and began to speak.

She spoke of the passionate soul of India in revolt; of monasteries placid in the shadow of snow-capped mountain peaks; of the heart of China, loyal to a tradition older than the name of England; of latticed rooms and their silken secrets; of the holy Ganges and of the forbidden Purple City. It was a song, a song of eager hearts, of a flaming torch leaping from crest to crest, firing the palm and destroying the pine; of the gloom of Himalayan valleys, of the sunshine whitening Damascus.

I heard of rose gardens and of great carnage; I saw the spirit of the Yellow People stand naked before me—and it was a great and a powerful



In the pillared hallway there were several discs of moving light.

spirit. A curved sword swept down out of the sky, and it cleaved a great ravine in the earth, upon one side of which I saw a great white army, and upon the other an army yellow, brown and black. One of the leaders of the yellow army crossed the ravine and for a while disappeared.

Then presently I saw him again, strangely habited, but his face was the face of Michael Hebron. Many times his raiment changed, but always

[Continued on page 38.]





IN ÆSOP'S FABLE LAND.

FROM THE PAINTING BY E. J. DETMOLD.





### NICOLETTE.

"The blossoms of the daisies which she broke off with the toes of her feet, which lay on the narrow of her foot above were right black against her feet and her legs, so very white was the maiden. She came to the postern, and unfastened it, and went out through the streets of Beaucaire, over against the shadow, for the moon shone very bright; and she went on till she came to the tower where her friend was."

FROM THE PAINTING BY EDMUND DULAC.



he remained facially the same. Incense and a murmuring like that in an Eastern bazaar ran through all the song, the siren song, and there was amber everywhere; amber and carmine, and the ivory of women's shoulders.

And now in the ordinary dress of an Englishman I saw Michael Hebron lying dead at my feet, and the music became a great, tremulous sigh. My other self stirred, questioning this trance which was half-delicious and half-terrifying. At one moment I had been in a palace of ivory; now I stood again beneath the canopy of cloth-of-gold, watching a beautiful sorceress coiled, serpentine, amid many cushions.

Another voice, a harsh voice, broke in upon the music. It called my name, urgently, insistently; and up from the very depths of my being burst a sudden strength. Putting forth a giant effort, I cast off the magic and the incense and the amber spell.

Knox!

As if my effort had brought death, darkness fell—and I found myself groping amid unfamiliar things, groping towards the voice which called, which now I knew for the voice of Paul Harley. There was a confused sound of knocking, too.

#### CHAPTER VIII.

##### ZANI CHADA'S CELLARS.

A DISC of light flickered in the darkness.

Then a shadowy figure came into view. It was Paul Harley, carrying an electric torch!

"But," I cried, the wonder of the thing suddenly bursting upon me—"warned me of what?"

"Of the uncanny power of this woman who has tricked us. How far she has tricked us I have yet to learn. Don't you understand, Knox? Hang it all, man, pull yourself together!"

"I am endeavouring to do so, Harley. What is that crashing sound?"

"Wessex breaking into the house. It will be daylight in ten minutes, and he probably thinks we are both murdered."

"Daylight!" I repeated. "Then how long—?"

"Between three and four hours!" interrupted Harley bitterly. "She took a big chance, Knox, even if she has escaped, which we have yet to learn. By this outrage she has made London too hot to hold her. But I can see why she took the chance. Now that it is too late, I can see many things that were dark to me before."

"But to me, Harley," I protested, "the whole affair has the seeming of a nightmare. You were sand-bagged, you say: but why? Her coolness in grasping the situation and dealing with it as she did, put us in a hopeless position. She could have had us arrested as burglars!"

"I know, Knox. But she wanted to learn what had become of Hebron and Julian, and she adopted the only means that occurred to her of finding out."

"What means? I don't follow."

"Listen," said Harley irritably. "My head feels as though it were splitting, and in any event this is no time for long explanations. But



Such an overhauling of the house of Zani Chada as I despair of describing. From foundation to roof there was not a square foot left unaccounted for.

"Where are you, Knox?" he cried, flashing the light all about us.

Suddenly he saw me where I stood. Doubtless I looked like one newly recovered from an opium debauch, for Harley stood still, staring at me with a strange expression in his eyes. I thought that he looked haggard and ill, and wondered why.

Truth to tell, my bemused mind was groping for an explanation of my presence in this room with its compassionate Madonna, its great jade Buddha, its canopy of cloth-of-gold, its mingling of Christianity and Paganism, and wild riot of colour. In the dim light of the torch it all looked shadowy and mysterious.

"I should have warned you," said Harley, and his voice sounded almost like a groan.

The knocking which I had heard dimly in my trance, now proclaimed itself to be a persistent battering upon some distant door.

"What has happened, Harley?" I whispered—"for God's sake, what has happened?"

"Several things," he returned grimly. "Simple in themselves, but collectively damnable. In the first place, the electric light has been turned off all over the house from some unknown switch in the cellars. In the second place, while you stood there drinking in the wicked beauty of Madame de Medici, I was neatly and efficiently sand-bagged from behind!"

"My God, Harley! and I never knew it!"

"You were past knowing anything! I should have warned you."

your recollections of our interview with Madame probably take you as far as the time when I asked you to recall a certain address?"

"I remember your doing so perfectly."

"I knew the address well enough, Knox! I was merely endeavouring to stimulate your mind to individual action. I could see what was happening to you."

"But," I cried, "what *was* happening to me?"

"You were being hypnotised!"

"What?"

"You were being hypnotised by the most proficient hypnotist in Europe; a woman who possesses dangerous powers as well as dangerous beauty. I have already hinted at several episodes in her career, but if I were to tell you the whole truth about Madame de Medici, even now I doubt if you would credit it."

"I find it hard to credit even your assertion that I have been hypnotised!"

"Do you?" Harley snapped. "Then, perhaps you will tell me of your experience since the moment when I was sand-bagged, and when, by the way, you made no attempt to assist me."

"My dear fellow!" I cried reproachfully, "don't remind me of that. Of course, I can see now, clearly enough, that I was under some unusual influence."

"Very unusual!" he replied. "But without disrespect I would add that men of greater mental powers than yourself have fallen under it

(Continued on page 42.)





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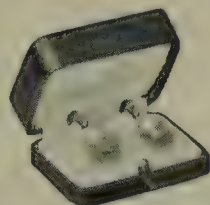
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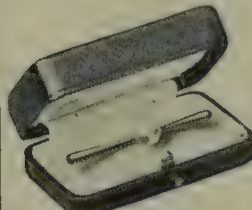
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AFTER THE PICTURE BY MAXFIELD PARRISH: PAINTED FOR KENNETH GRAHAME'S "DREAM DAYS."





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more than once. But tell me quickly what you can recollect of your experience."

I clutched my head, because it seemed to me that to-night I had stepped clear of solid earth, and for a while had moved amongst phantom things; in a world beyond the boundary of common-sense, governed by laws whose very existence was denied by science. Then haltingly I began to recount what I could remember of my dream or trance, for to this day I cannot define it. As I concluded:

"Right!" said Harley rapidly; "I suspected it. Knox, all that we know, she knows now. She holds every clue that *we* hold! She knows that two members of the organisation are dead, and, unless I am greatly mistaken, Limehouse will never see Madame de Medici again. Her activities, unfortunately, will be renewed elsewhere, no doubt."

I stared at him haggardly.

"But——"

"Oh, she knows, Knox, she knows!" he cried. "She has sucked your brain empty of every bit of information of interest to her!"

As he spoke, the distant hammering culminated in a dull crash.

"The door is down," he said. "Come on, Knox!"

At that, flashing the light of his torch ahead of him, he walked out of the room, staggering slightly, by which I knew that he was still suffering from the effects of the assault upon him. I followed, and presently my feet were sinking into the thickness of the carpet upon the wide staircase. Below, in the pillared hallway, there were several discs of moving light, and a confusion of voices came up to me.

"Mr. Harley!" I heard, and it was Inspector Wessex who cried the name.

"All right, Wessex!" my friend replied.

"We are both safe."

"Thank God!" cried the Scotland Yard man.

"What news, Wessex?" asked Harley, descending the stairs. "You have followed all the men who left the house?"

"All the men who left the house?" came another voice with which I was unfamiliar. "Nobody has left the house—not a soul! Neither this house nor that of Kwee!"

"What?" Harley cried sharply.

"Then there is still a chance, but a remote one! Knox, take a party through the passage to the house of Kwee. You know the way. If the doors are closed, post someone there and report to me. We can then break in from the front. Meanwhile, Wessex, spread your men out, and search this burrow from cellar to attic. Particularly try to find the main switch and get some light on again."

Thereupon commenced such an overhauling of the house of Zani Chada as I despair of describing. From foundation to roof there was not a square foot left unaccounted for. The whole place was queerly and exotically furnished. In the scheme there was a substratum that was purely Chinese, but in many of the rooms it had become overlaid with a sort of mediæval luxuriousness which I suppose reflected the personality of Madame de Medici: so that some of the rooms might have belonged to a Florentine courtesan of the time of Lorenzo the Magnificent, whilst others were sheerly barbaric.

The place was laden with costly things, and I wondered what their fate would be. But of this house packed with bewildering treasures, as the storehouse of some ancient buccaneer, the outstanding wonder was, that excepting ourselves and the police, no living soul could we find within its four walls!

Kwee's also was empty from roof to cellar, and I had rarely witnessed a more curious scene than that discovered as dawn crept over the roofs of Chinatown, touching greyly the faces of the search-party.

"We should never have found the passage from Kwee's," said Harley bitterly, "if it had not been shown to us. Doubtless there is another by which they all escaped."

"Zani Chada's cellars have had the reputation of being catacombs for some years now," Wessex added.

"Well—" Harley turned to me and conjured up a smile—"where Raymond McCabe failed I need not be ashamed to do likewise."

"But you have not failed yet, Harley!" I cried.

"No," he murmured, "but I have missed my big chance."

We walked back to Limehouse Police Station through the deserted streets. The storm had blown over, but the skies remained grey and lowering. In some subtle fashion, I felt ashamed of myself. I had given important information to the enemy, and the fact that I had been forced to do so by a superior will was poor consolation, especially since the superior will was that of a woman.

As we came in sight of the police depot:

"Oh, by the way, Mr. Harley," said Wessex, "your secretary, Mr. Innes, 'phoned several times during the night; and finally at close upon two o'clock this morning."

"What about?" asked Harley listlessly.

"A messenger from the Foreign Office had delivered an important letter."

"What's that? From the Foreign Office?"

Harley's face lighted up.

"Yes," replied Wessex. "I explained that we couldn't get in touch with you at the time, and Mr. Innes said, as he expected the matter was of importance, that he would remain at your office until you 'phoned."

"He'll have turned in by now," murmured Harley, whose chambers adjoined his business premises. "I see the Daimler is waiting, so I need not wake him by 'phoning. We can drop you and Sergeant Preston at Figtree Court, and I will go along to Chancery Lane."

He had already imparted to Wessex details of the gruesome crime which had been committed in the chambers above my own, so that Wessex merely nodded in acquiescence; and when certain necessary formalities had been gone through at Limehouse Police Station, Harley and myself, with Wessex and his assistant, Detective-Sergeant Preston, drove through the empty East End streets on that grey morning, a disconsolate quartette.

A unique opportunity to learn the secrets of one of the most deadly groups ever organised for the overthrow of established Governments had been lost. We knew no more respecting the identity of the Black Mandarin than we had known at the outset. Except for Madame de Medici, not one name was added to the list of members known to the authorities. Worst of all, they must now be fully alive to their peril.

Not only had we failed to achieve anything, but we had also undone the result of much patient work in the past. We were a silent party, and as we passed around St. Paul's Churchyard, I wondered if I had the stomach to face again the shambles in that top set.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE MESSAGE FROM PEKIN.

WHEN presently we were seated in the book-lined study, at the back of the office in which Harley ordinarily received his clients during business hours, he poured out two stiff pegs of whisky. Innes brought in the Foreign Office letter, and Harley eagerly tore open the envelope and scanned the contents.

"Ah," he murmured—"in code. If you will excuse me, Knox, I will decipher it at once."

He set to work, his pipe fuming between his teeth, whilst at the other side of the room I outlined to Innes the extraordinary events of the night. Our murmured conversation was presently interrupted by a cry from Harley.

"A message from the Legation at Pekin! The first definite clue to the identity of the Black Mandarin which has ever come to hand. And an important one!"

Surrounding himself with clouds of tobacco smoke, he continued his task of decoding the message. I must confess that I had lost track of the time, for on these "Baghdad nights" with Harley I had grown used to seeing dawn break over London. But, although the lamps were lighted in the study, it was broad daylight.

I had resumed my conversation with Innes.

Suddenly the telephone bell rang. I ceased speaking, staring at him interrogatively. Harley also looked up from his task, the results of which so far, judging from his expression, I divined to be vitally important. The bell rang again and again when none of us made any movement to answer it.

"Extraordinary!" Harley murmured, his heavy eyebrows raised, "who the devil can it be? Will you attend to it, Innes?"

Innes nodded, stood up, and went out of the study to the outer office, while Harley immediately became absorbed again in his code message. The next moment he laid down his pencil, stood up suddenly and turned to me.

"Knox," he said, "there is someone on the telephone. Have you any idea who it is?"

"Not the slightest."

We stood together watching and waiting. That Harley's extraordinary powers of intuition had forewarned him I cannot doubt; but for my part I started back literally stupefied when:

"Madame de Medici to speak to you," said Innes, returning.

"Madame de Medici?"

"At any rate it was a lady's voice," said Innes.

The expression on Harley's face I cannot pretend to define. I knew his immovable calm. But this was so totally unexpected that we could only stare at one another. Recovering himself, he proceeded to the telephone.

I followed him, and, obeying his silent invitation, took up the second receiver with which the instrument was equipped.

"Madame de Medici speaking," she began. Harley recognised the silver voice instantly—should I ever forget it? His grim, bronzed face afforded a study which would have taxed the father of physiognomy. She continued:

[Continued on page 40.]







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The Wilkinson New Model Safety Shaver is the very latest thing in Safety Razors. Special Features are:—

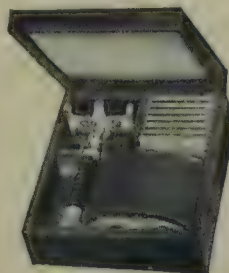
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### THE LEGEND OF ST. BARBARA: THE RESCUE BY THE ANGELS.

Saint Barbara, Patron Saint of Ferrara and Mantua, of arms, armourers, and fortifications, and against thunder and lightning, was the only daughter of Dioscorus, a noble of Nicomedia. Her father loved her so much that, fearful of losing her by marriage, he hid her from the eyes of man, in a high tower. There she spent her time in thought and study, and came to the belief that the gods of her father could not be the true gods. She was converted and baptised by one of Origen's disciples, sent to her in the disguise of a physician. She instructed the workmen to build three windows in her tower, instead of two; saying that she desired it so,

because it was through three windows (the Trinity) that the soul received light. Thus her father saw that she was a Christian, and, filled with rage, he would have killed her; but she escaped to the top of her tower, and was carried thence by angels. A shepherd showed Dioscorus her place of concealment, and he dragged her from it by the hair, and, finding imprisonment and ill-treatment powerless to move her, gave her up to the proconsul, under whose orders she suffered cruel tortures. Still her faith was unshaken; so her father carried her off to a mountain and beheaded her himself. In descending the mountain, he was killed by lightning.

FROM THE PICTURE BY ELEANOR FORTESCUE BRICKDALE.





I'd forgotten  
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contains all the vital elements of the golden wheat. It nourishes brain and body; promotes vigorous health; brings bounding vitality.

YOUR BAKER BAKES IT.



"I must apologise for troubling you at this unearthly hour, but then, you did not shrink from troubling me."

Harley winced under the cutting lash of her words.

I am leaving London almost immediately, and I deeply regret my inability to return your unexpected call. I equally regret my lack of hospitality, Mr. Harley, even if you were an uninvited guest. Last night a deadly blow was struck at the organisation to which I belong. I know everything now. While you and your friends have been making



I took up the second receiver with which the instrument was equipped.

yourselves busy in Limehouse I have visited the scene of the tragedy. But with all your cleverness the end is not yet. We shall meet again, my friend, and it may be that we shall understand one another better."

Then silence!

Harley could think of nothing to say. When he did find words, Madame had gone. He returned to the study and we stood like two carven men. At last my friend said:

"I have met my Waterloo, Knox, and she called me up to gloat over my defeat."

"What do you mean, Harley?"

He did not reply to my question, but:

"Somewhere deep in my very bones I admire that woman," he continued: "within the last eight hours, whilst we have been making ourselves ridiculous, she has forestalled us every time."

"Harley," I cried, "it is all so incomprehensible."

"It will be clear as day," he assured me, "when we have heard the report of Inspector Wessex. Good God!"—he brought his open hand down upon the table—"that that woman could be visiting Hebron's chambers while we were guessing what to do. Have you any idea, Knox, of the nationality of Madame de Medici? Does she look Italian?" he snapped.

"Not in the least."

"She has lived in Italy," he went on, beginning to gather up his papers from the table. "Indeed, I think she has lived in almost every country, in almost every capital of the world, at one time or another. But at last I think I have placed her."

"Do you mean in regard to her origin?"

"Yes—and it explains many things," He stared me squarely in the face. "She is Chinese, Knox!"

"What!" I cried.

"She is Chinese!—a fact which opens up an entirely new line of enquiry. But, truth to tell, I have lost faith in myself. Another peg of whisky is indicated, I think, Knox. And then we will rejoin Wessex."

There was intense but suppressed excitement in his manner; but now, as he gave a final glance at the decoded message, it occurred to me that the information received from the British Legation in Peking was really responsible for this.

When presently we set out, I was in no mood for the horrors of

Michael Hebron's chambers; for, what with the mad traffic of the night and the fact that at this chilly hour of dawn vitality was at its lowest ebb, I felt that my presence at the official enquiry would be both useless to those concerned and distressing to myself.

However, I mastered my feelings as well as might be, and presently found myself standing before the door of that top set where properly our adventure had commenced. Sergeant Preston opened to us, and almost immediately I detected that queer, incense-like smell, which characterised the chambers. Wessex was standing just inside the lobby, his note book in his hand, and:

"Well, Wessex," said Harley eagerly, "what have you discovered?"

"I think I have reconstructed the affair," replied the Scotland Yard man "that is to say, I can give you a fairly clear idea of what happened."

"Good!" rapped Harley. "Go on."

"Suppose we talk in here," said Wessex, opening a door on the right. "Afterwards we will go over the ground together and you can check my reasoning."

We entered a plainly furnished dining-room, Wessex turning up the light. Frequently referring to his notebook he outlined the results of his enquiry.

"The divisional surgeon hasn't come yet," he explained, "but that doesn't matter very much. The facts, it appears to me, are these: The man called Julian came here some time during the evening, to call upon Michael Hebron. The exact time I expect to learn by enquiries at the flat in Maida Vale. He was in evening dress and carried a small attaché-case which contained, according to your account, Mr. Harley, a black-cowled robe."

"It did," Harley confirmed. "And a similar robe I found folded up in a hand-bag in Michael Hebron's bed-room."

"Very well," continued Wessex. "He went into the study, and talked to Hebron for some time. I have counted the cigar

ette stumps, and I have worked it out that he must have been there for fully half an hour. What they quarrelled about we don't know, and probably shall never know——"

"On the contrary," interrupted Harley, "I think I know already!"

"What do you mean, Mr. Harley?" asked Wessex surprisedly.

"That you know what caused the quarrel?"

"It wasn't exactly a quarrel," replied Harley: "but go on."

"Well, then," continued Wessex, glancing at him questioningly, "from a table drawer which is still open, Hebron took out a Colt repeater, fitted with a silencer—presumably unnoticed by Julian—and shot him as he sat in the armchair. He probably meant to shoot him through the heart. The bullet was an inch too high."

"I know," murmured Harley; "I saw the wound."



I detected that queer, incense-like smell that characterised the chambers.

"Julian, who must have been a man of indomitable will, started to his feet, upsetting the ash-tray from the arm of his chair, and fell upon his assailant. Hebron must have dropped the pistol when Julian

[Continued overleaf.]



sprang, for Julian evidently got him by the throat, threw him, and, in spite of a ghastly wound, squeezed the life out of him."

"Yes, yes," said Harley rapidly, "I agree with all your conclusions so far, Wessex."

"I think it possible," continued Wessex, "but it is for the divisional surgeon to say, that Julian might have recovered from his wound except for the violent exertion of his attack upon Hebron. He was determined to kill him. So far I am fairly sure of my ground, Mr. Harley. From various clues which I can show to you I have reconstructed the whole affair. We now come to mere surmises. Julian, having finished the man who had shot him, seems to have staggered into the next room, evidently with the idea of getting to the telephone. He had actually opened the book and almost reached the instrument, when a tremendous hæmorrhage seems to have finished him."

"He had done more than that," said Harley gravely. "He had given a few more years of peace to a world that was threatened with war."

#### CHAPTER X.

##### THE BLACK MARK.

"I SUGGEST, now," said Wessex, mastering



"From a table drawer Hebron took out a Colt repeater . . . and shot him as he sat in the armchair."

the surprise occasioned by this statement, "that we go into the study and view the body of Hebron, which I have not moved more than was necessary for my enquiry."

"Very well," Harley agreed.

We fled into the room of which I had ghastly memories, and there was the long gaunt figure stretched upon the floor. I turned, looking at Harley, and, although his face was set and mask-like, his eyes gleamed feverishly, and I, who knew him well, realised that he held a hidden clue to this baffling mystery. He did not speak, however, until Wessex had drawn his attention to the data by means of which he had reconstructed the details of the crime. But presently:

"Have you determined the nationality of the man Hebron?" he asked.

"Well," Wessex replied, "we may term him an international, but I should say he was Asiatic."

"Asiatic, yes," rapped Harley. "A Chinaman."

"Likely enough," returned Wessex—"as you say he belonged to the Black Mandarin group."

"Look well at his face, Knox," Harley invited. "Note the intellectual strength of the brow—the power in every line."

(Continued overleaf.)

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(Illustrated London News, Xmas No., 1922.)

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Chorea	Gumboils	Rheumatic Fever
Consumption	Heart-Disease	Scarlet Fever
Deafness	Influenza	Sore Throat
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I looked as he directed, but was revolted by the spectacle, for the man had died of strangulation. His throat was discoloured and his features were contorted.

"This," said Harley, "was no ordinary man." He turned to Wessex. "His fists are tightly clenched?"

"Yes," was the reply, "he clenched them in his death agony, I suppose."

"Probably," murmured Harley, in a voice so altered that I glanced at him sharply.

Intense excitement, long repressed, now manifested itself unmistakably. Even Detective-Sergeant Preston, who was engaged in making an inventory of the contents of the room, noted it, for he looked up from his work as Harley drew a sheet of quarto paper out of his breast pocket, and began to speak again.

"I have here," he said, "a decoded message which has come through from Pekin. I will not read it in detail, but it contains a definite clue to the personality of the Black Mandarin."

"At last!" cried Wessex. "You know who he is?"

"No," returned Harley; "but it is a clue which should enable one to recognise him anywhere, and it is contained in these words"—he read from his own transcription:



In the centre of the dead man's palm was a discoloured patch resembling a bruise.

"Owing to some obscure pathological condition, the official denominated 'I' " (he glanced aside to me—"This refers to the Black Mandarin, Knox," he explained, and continued to read) "bears a characteristic mark to which possibly the name by which he has become known may be attributed. In the palm of his right hand is a deep, nearly black, patch or stain, some two inches in diameter."

He replaced the paper in his pocket, and:

"At last, Knox!" he cried. "Now I understand why the palms of our hands were scrutinised so closely to-night when we returned the salutation given to us! Now I know what upset all our calculations and brought the whole ceremony to such an abrupt end."

"Good heavens! you don't mean—"

"Perhaps I am jumping to conclusions," he broke in, "but at least we can test the matter."

He dropped on one knee beside the body of Michael Hebron, seized the clenched right fist and forced the fingers open, then:

"I was right!" he cried triumphantly, and started to his feet.

In the centre of the dead man's palm was a discoloured patch resembling a bruise!

"Why, Mr. Harley,"  
[Continued overleaf.]

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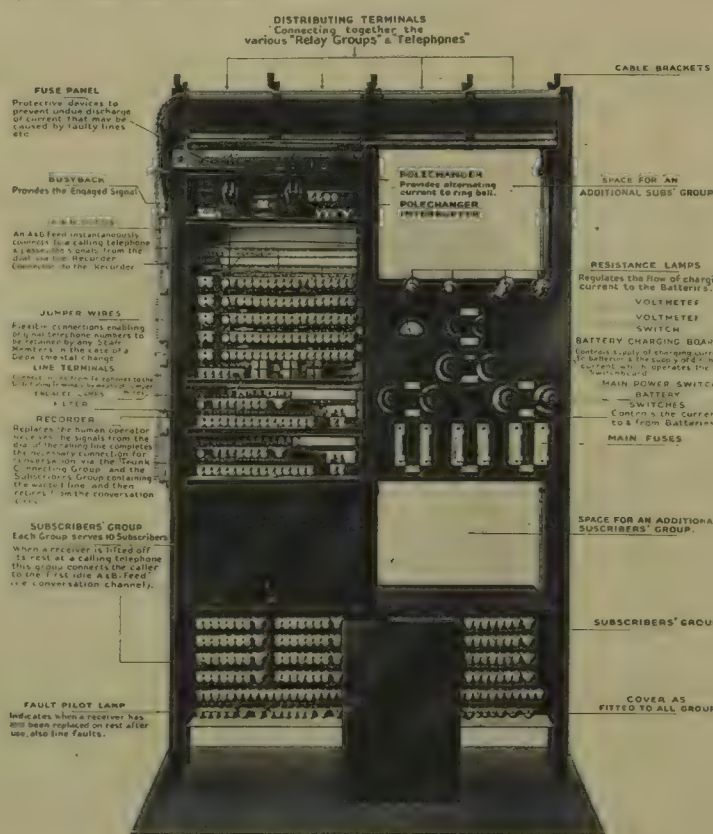
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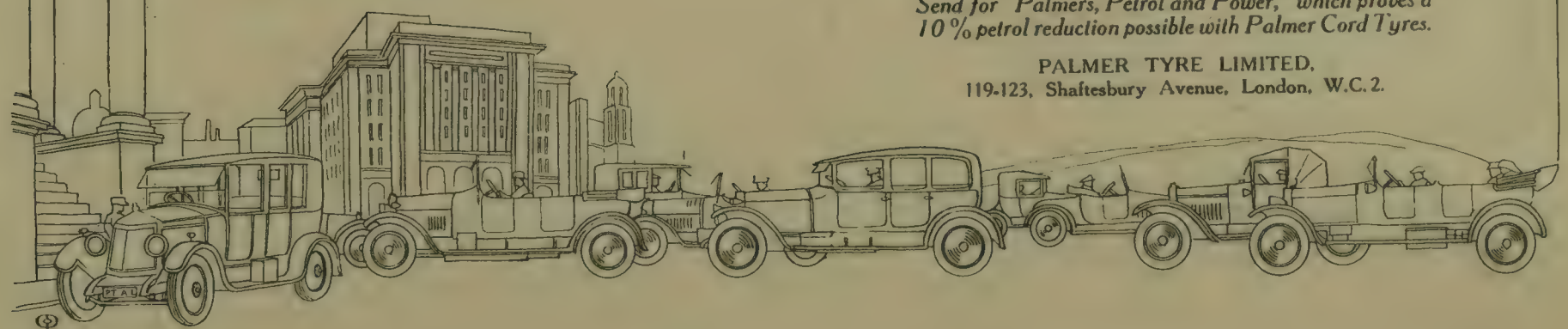
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said Wessex—and the words came as a mere whisper—"does this mean that the Black Mandarin

"It means," interrupted Harley, "that the Black Mandarin, in the name of Michael Hebron, has been living in these chambers for many weeks past, but above all it means that the Black Mandarin is dead! He lies here at our feet!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Wessex; whilst for my own part I was incapable of speech.

"We might have known, Knox," continued Harley excitedly; "it was as plain as daylight. Undoubtedly the meeting at the house of Madame de Medici was convened to meet the Black Mandarin in person! Him it was they expected. He it was who should have occupied the presidential chair in which I seated myself! His personality was unknown to his associates, do you understand, as it was unknown to the rest of the world. I thought I was impersonating an ordinary member of the group, whereas I was endeavouring to impersonate the dreaded Chief, the man for whom the Secret Services of four countries have been seeking for years!"

"But, Harley," I cried, "one at least of the group must have been acquainted with the secret and must have been in his confidence!"

The expression on Paul Harley's face underwent a subtle change.

"You refer to Julian?" he suggested.

"Well," replied Wessex, who seemed to have been stupefied by this astounding discovery, "I think, but am not sure, that his hair is dyed."

"Ah!" cried Harley. "Eyebrows and eyelashes?"

"Dyed also, if my theory is correct."

"You mean that naturally he is a blonde man?"

"That is the idea."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing much," replied Wessex, staring hard, "except that he was certainly not an Asiatic, although, from what we have learned to-night, I gather that he must have been high in the confidence of the Black Mandarin."

"There is no doubt of it," replied Harley, leading the way to the next room. "You noticed, I suppose," he added, speaking over his shoulder, "that the telephone directory was open at the

page upon which my name appears?"

"It had not occurred to me," confessed Wessex. "Is there any particular significance in the fact?"

"There is a very great significance!" Harley assured him.

[Continued overleaf.]



We stood grouped in the doorway looking at the huddled figure in the chair.

"Certainly."

"This is the eve of my retirement, Knox," he continued strangely, and turned to Wessex. "Before we go into the next room," he said, "have you learned anything regarding the other dead man—Julian?"

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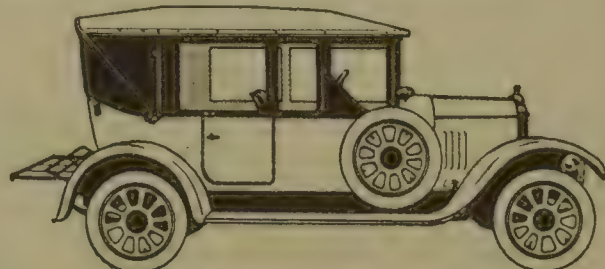
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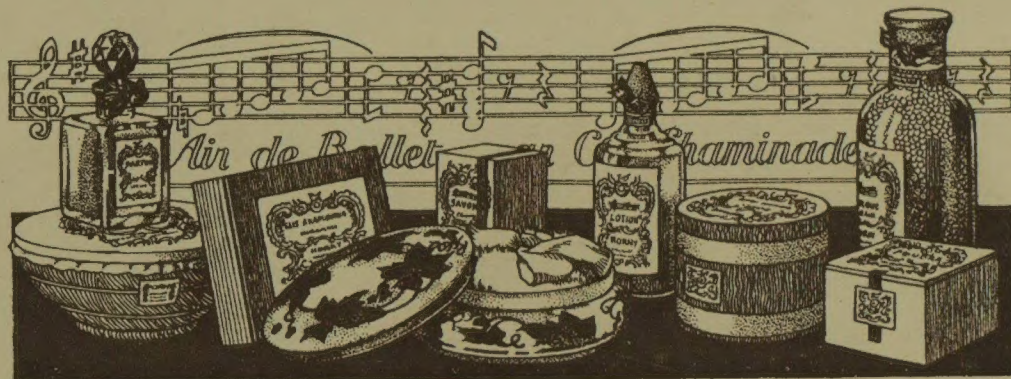
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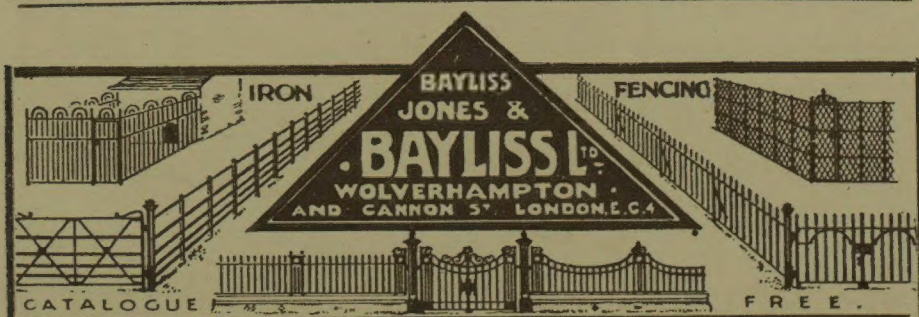
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We stood grouped in the doorway looking at the huddled figure in the chair, for Inspector Wessex had left the body much as it had been found until the divisional surgeon should have made his examination. Harley paused, and—

"When you go to the flat in Maida Vale, Wessex," he said, "to confirm the time of Julian's departure, I shall certainly accompany you."

"His papers will no doubt be of interest," Wessex admitted.

"I anticipate that they will be of extraordinary interest," replied Harley; "in fact, I am going to 'phone Scotland Yard immediately to see that Madame de Medici does not anticipate us. She may have anticipated us already."

He looked at me; his eyes were afire with excitement.

"Those premises must be guarded, Wessex. They probably contain information of vital interest to the British Empire as well as to the United States!"

Let me confess that the discovery of my neighbour Michael Hebron's being none other than the Black Mandarin had staggered me to such a degree that now I was

utterly incapable of following Paul Harley's reasoning. I knew not what he implied, or what to anticipate, and I think that Wessex, and certainly Preston, who stood behind us in the doorway, shared my bewilderment. Then

"You should have known what, Harley?" I asked.

"I should have known that his hair was dyed," he replied. "I should have understood that a better man than I can ever hope to be had given his life for his country, Knox!"

He stood upright and spoke passionately.

"You and I and a million who will never even hear of the things that have happened to-night, you and I who have paid tribute to those who saved us from the curse of Prussianism, should unite, I think, with every man, woman, and child of the white races in doing honour to the memory of one who has averted an even greater evil."

We stood there watching him, Preston, Wessex, and I, in our dense stupidity not comprehending, until, at last, suddenly, blindingly, the light came.

"Harley, Harley!" I said, "I understand——"

He looked at Wessex—

"Do you understand?"

"I am sorry, Mr. Harley, but I don't."

"Then I will enlighten you. This is Raymond McCabe, of the American Secret Service!"

[THE END.]

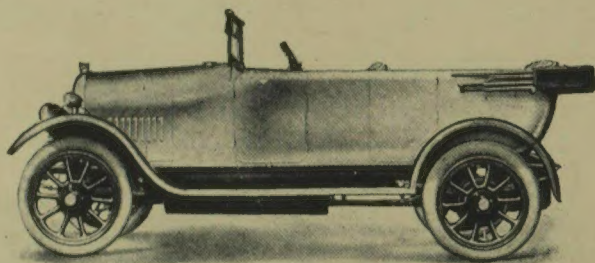


Harley peered into the ghastly face of the dead man, tilting the lamp-shade as he did so.

Harley stepped forward, bent, and peered into the ghastly face of the dead man, tilting the lampshade on the table as he did so.

"I should have known," he murmured; "I should have known."

At last I found words, and—



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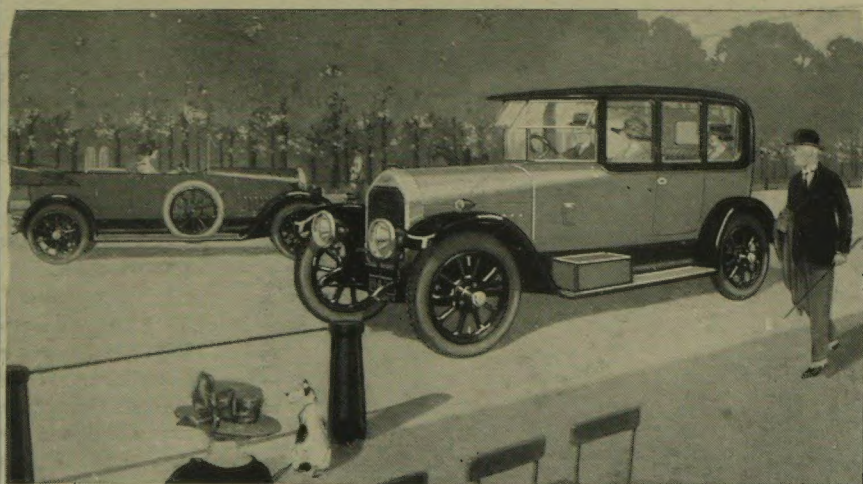
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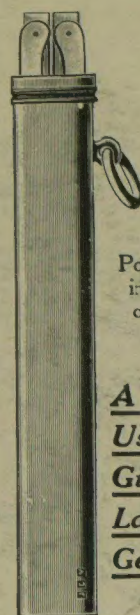
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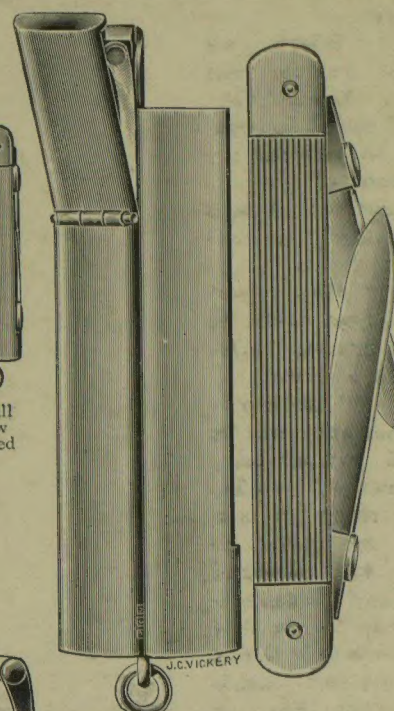


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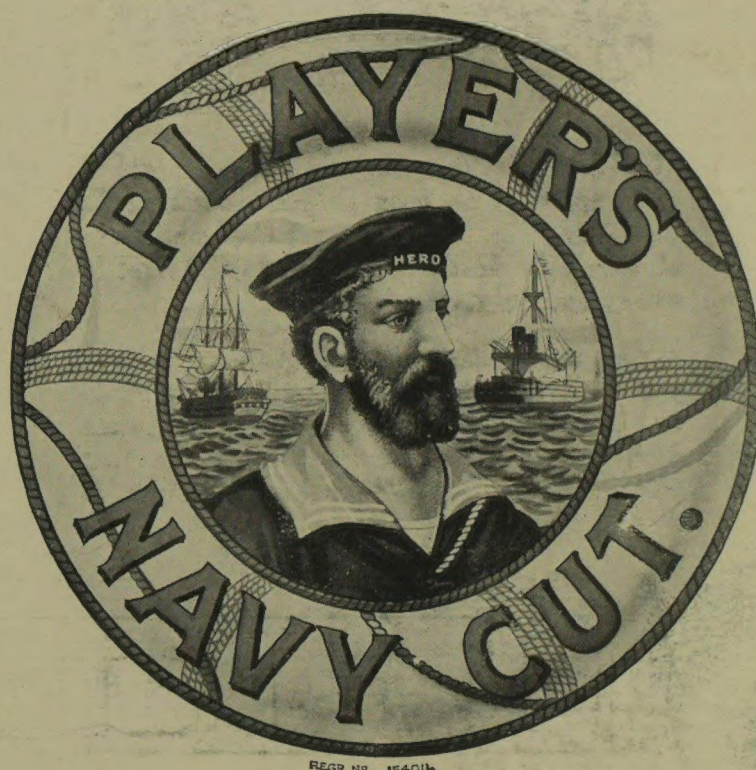
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